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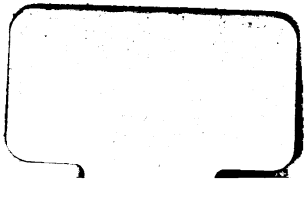
THE CASTLE OF DAWN

HAROLD MORTON KRAMER

KD 15411



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...STLE OF DAY

BY

...MORTON ...AMES

THE CASTLE OF DAWN

BY

HAROLD MORTON KRAMER

AUTHOR OF "HEARTS AND THE CROSS"
AND "GAYLE LANGFORD"

ILLUSTRATED BY H. C. EDWARDS

BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

KD 15411

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THE CASTLE OF DAWN

CHAPTER I

THE CAUSE OF IT ALL

HAD Philip Elmore gone direct to the railroad station that June evening when he left the managing editor's office, it never would have happened.

But he did not. Instead, he chose to drop into — or, more correctly speaking, to climb up to — the office of his very good friend, John Morden, affectionately known as "Jack," and there Fate laid hands on him and plunged him into a sea of intrigue, just as Elmore himself used to toss pebbles into puddles of water and watch the ripples widen. And before that debonair young man had time to realize what had happened, the ripples caused by his being hurled into this sea had widened until they were rolling in angry billows which threatened to engulf him.

And yet he had done nothing more incrimi-

nating than to visit Morden's law office for a few moments' chat on very commonplace subjects. By such trivial incidents are our lives moulded and our destinies decided.

Should you glance from your car window at the proper point on the great plains of North Dakota, a giant tree with no others within miles of it may attract your attention, and should the porter be versed in the lore of that section, he would tell you how on one winter's day a man was hanged there because it was alleged that he had stolen a horse. His protestations were vain. It was too cold to bother with a prisoner when a tree was so temptingly near, and so his lifeless body was found dangling, half an hour later, by a man who had ridden hard to inform the posse that, after all, the horse had not been stolen. Had a bird not dropped a seed there long years before, there would have been no tree and a man's life would not have gone out in injustice. Such is the power of trivialities.

Elmore hesitated a moment as he stood in State Street and looked up at the window bearing Morden's name. His railroad ticket was in his pocket, his sleeper reservation awaited him at the Pullman office in the depot, — the "Courier" had attended to all of that, — and his bag-

gage was also at the station. Why not spend the time with Jack?

The elevator was up, as they always are when you are down, so Philip mounted the stairs to the second floor.

He was much surprised at finding the door to Morden's receiving room locked, but the rat-a-tat of his knuckles on the frosted glass soon resulted in the turning of a key in the lock, the door was opened a very little bit, and Morden himself peeped out, a little anxiously, the caller thought. Then the door was swung wide, and there was no mistaking the genuineness of the smile on the lawyer's face.

"Phil Elmore! Why — why — come in!"

He clutched his visitor's hand and shook it with undoubted pleasure, but there was a certain air of nervousness apparent in his greeting.

"I've only a few minutes to spare, Jack," replied the caller, entering the room. "But what's up? To tell the truth, old fellow, you appeared slightly 'rattled' by my knock. Didn't think it was the Black Hand, did you?"

Phil laughed easily as he flung himself into a chair without waiting for an invitation, and Morden, with his back to the other as he fum-

bled among some papers on the desk, joined in the laugh.

"Don't be ridiculous, Phil," he said, facing about. "I was absorbed with some important business with a client and had locked the door because it was after hours. Try one of these cigars."

"I'm on my way to a train, and just dropped in for a 'howdy.'" A flaming match was held to the cigar.

"Oh, the other fellow is busy with a bunch of papers, anyway, so you are warmly welcome. Getting out of town again? Haven't been back long, have you?"

"Three days — and now I'm on the wing again just because I got a smattering of law into my head at the University."

The attorney laughed.

"I warned you against law. But whither this time?"

"Texas."

"Where's your gun?"

"Very poor joke that." Elmore regarded him with mock severity. "It stamps you a thoroughbred Yankee as plainly as your habit of saying 'pail' for 'bucket.' But I don't mind telling you that I have a revolver somewhere

in my suit case, which I sent down to the station."

"Another 'Courier' assignment?"

"Yes. In the morning the 'Courier' will announce that 'in accordance with its well-known policy of giving the public complete and reliable information on all affairs of importance, it has despatched a special correspondent to Texas to investigate the land frauds.'"

"And you're the man because you know something of the law on the subject, eh?"

Another nod and a lazy puffing at the cigar.

"Phil, how much longer is that close-fisted old uncle of yours going to keep you doing stunts on a newspaper?"

Elmore blew a ring of smoke toward the ceiling.

"Don't malign my kin, Jack, just because the dear man insists that I must prove myself to have mettle if I am to be his heir. The stipulation was that I was to secure a place on a reputable newspaper and 'make good.' If I can hold the place for a year, he says he'll think I am fit for something besides following a pack of fox-hounds."

Morden nodded. "And you are rather fond of the hounds, I believe."

"I'd rob you of that sneer, Sir Cynic, could I but get you down into my Tennessee. You know nothing of music, Jack, until you sit a horse in the moonlight and hear the chorus of the pack in the ravine below. Old Drum has a bass that never flats nor sharps, and when Diana —"

"Enough! Your uncle was right — but he ought to have made your probation two years."

"Don't fret. I have two months more of my year, and as I like the North, I think I shall reënlist for another year with the 'Courier.'"

The lawyer looked at his friend in evident astonishment.

"It's something like fox-hunting, after all," Phil said, in answer to the look, "though the fox is a two-legged animal. But there's a certain thrill in chasing him across the hills and through the ravines of intrigue. And you've got to be a hurdler, or your fox will escape while you're trying to get around an obstacle."

"Glad you've taken to the work, my boy. But don't hide away from us so much. Come out to the house when you return. Edith and the kiddies will be glad to see you."

"I'll certainly be glad to call when I get a

chance." The "Courier" man arose. "I must be off now."

"Wait a moment." The lawyer stepped into his consultation room, and Phil heard a few words spoken in a low tone. Then Morden came back, his hat in hand. "I'll walk a short distance with you," he said.

They sauntered down the street leisurely, discussing personal matters of interest to them both, but after a few blocks had been passed they shook hands and parted.

"Don't let the fox dodge you," said Morden.

As Elmore turned away, his elbow struck a man who had stopped close beside them, ostensibly to inspect a show window, but Phil murmured a hasty apology and walked on down the street. He did not hurry. He had plenty of time, and the roar of State Street was music to him; the glare of the thousands of electric lights pleased him; even the tinny notes of the "Amusement Parlor" phonographs brought a smile to his lips as he passed. At Van Buren Street a train on the elevated clattered across overhead and a moment later swung around into Wabash Street. Beside the curb a detachment of the Salvation Army knelt in the dirt, while one of the women sang a sacred

song to the tune of "Bill Bailey," accompanied by bass drum and guitar. He crossed over to Dearborn and turned south toward the station. The clock in the tower showed its yellow light through the smoke and haze, but above the tower the moon was hanging, clear and clean-looking.

"What a contrast between the work of God and man!" he muttered.

The stuffy little station was crowded, and to add to the general confusion and uncleanliness of the picture a train from the East had just rolled into the sheds, and its coaches were belching forth some scores of Norwegian immigrants, who, led by the land agent, formed in column and marched through the waiting-room and out to Dearborn Street, and then plodded across the city to where another train waited to bear them away to Western homes. It was not an uncommon sight, but one to which the Tennesseean could never grow hardened, and so there came a tinge of pity into his heart as he watched the heavy-eyed procession pass out into the glare, the roar, and the heedlessness of this great city, each heart in that plodding column filled with wonderment, dismay, homesickness. And still they trudged onward,

until to the man who watched from the station they were swallowed up by the surging thousands.

"Food for the great giant men call Progress," thought Elmore, and then he walked out of the station and threw his head back until he could again see the moon above it all. "I believe it's good for a man to glimpse a bit of moonlight now and then," he added.

A glance at his watch showed that it was close to train time, and going into the depot, he made his way to the Pullman office. Just ahead of him in the waiting line was a young woman, but he gave her no heed. His thoughts still followed the plodding immigrants. The fingers in the Pullman office were deft, the wits nimble, and in a brief space of time he was receiving the red ticket that entitled him to the privilege of wadding his clothing into one of those ridiculous little hammocks while he enjoyed the pleasure of sitting cross-legged on a heaving, pitching bunk and bumping his head repeatedly in his efforts to stow himself away to the best advantage.

He was turning away when he noticed another bit of red lying on the brass-plated arm-rest at the edge of the ticket window. He

picked it up and saw that it was a sleeper ticket. Like a flash he knew the owner — the girl who had been just ahead of him in the line. He remembered now that she had had some annoyance with her purse and her change, and had laid them down for just the briefest space of time while she brought order out of chaos. Clearly, she had failed to pick up her ticket.

A moment of indecision was his while his eyes swept the hurrying throngs. She was nowhere in sight, and his duty was —

"I spy!" And he laughed to himself as he hurried toward the slight figure in gray just leaving the waiting-room.

"Your pardon, please." He touched her on the arm. "I am sure you have lost your ticket."

There was a half-frightened exclamation from the girl, that rather amused him, and then it was checked, and a voice said, somewhat tremulously:

"I am a bit — nervous — I — my ticket?" There was a hasty glance into the recesses of a silk-lined purse. "How childish of me. I failed to pick it up, I know. You are very kind."

The train caller was bellowing something in

an unclassified language, and the crowd surged about Elmore, but he stood like a rock for a moment, splitting the stream of humanity with his broad shoulders and firm-set legs. His hat was in his hand and his head was bare, just as he had been when he had bowed to her, — but where she had stood there was now a fat man whose breath was heavy with that which is declared to have made a certain city famous. Phil replaced his hat and shoved his way to the baggage room, after which he passed through the gate, gave his hand luggage into the keeping of the train porter, and dropped into a seat in the smoking-room of the Pullman.

She had smiled as she thanked him, had she not? Assuredly — and he? He had mumbled some inane words. What were they? And that beast with the beery breath had blotted her out! Why had he not punched the beast's head for daring to stand where she had stood when she smiled? Puff, puff! The smoke rings had much of magic in them, for they brought him pictures. Yes, he remembered now — her eyes were brown; and her hair — not black — no — but dark, and soft as silk. Pshaw! Soft as silk! He had not touched it. But he knew he was right.

"Does this train go over the Merchants' Bridge or through the tunnel at St. Louis?"

He blinked his eyes a few moments at his questioner before he came back from his dreams.

"The Merchants', I think—and hope. That hole under the streets should be plugged up by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Travellers."

"Never heard of such an organization," said the stranger, with a laugh.

"Neither did I, but it should be organized at once by those who go down to tunnels in trains."

He surveyed his companion critically as he voiced this badinage, and found the other's face familiar in a baffling way. He was of medium height, swarthy of complexion, square-shouldered, and with eyes that seemed restless and ever searching for something. In dress he was the well-to-do business man of the day.

"I don't mean to stare, but I think I have met you somewhere."

The stranger shook his head.

"Never before now, I think."

"Of course I may be mistaken — but — yes,

such resemblances are common, and — no, I know now! I struck you with my elbow while you were standing at the corner of State and Van Buren streets!"

The other caught his under lip with his teeth in an impulsive way, but quickly checked himself.

"I believe you are right. I remember of the collision, now that you mention it."

"Yes — the world isn't so large, after all. One cannot even hide himself successfully for long."

He drew a newspaper from his pocket and hid himself behind it, thereby failing to note the gleam that flashed into his companion's eyes. The train rattled on, lurching around curves and speeding across bridges, with sullen roars. The men had the smoking-room to themselves, and the buffet porter, after one or two anxious queries as to whether they wished beer and sandwiches, blotted them from his list. Elmore glanced up occasionally from his reading, and always he found the eyes of the stranger on him in an annoying way.

"I haven't had a chance to read the evening papers," said the man, at last. "Anything new in them?"

"Yes — startling news. The 'Courier' gives the information that its advertising last month totalled sixty-eight more columns than any other paper in Chicago."

"Bah!" The stranger scowled slightly. "I mean real news — politics, for instance. Of course you are interested in politics." There was a question in his tone.

"Not a bit. I don't care a rap about the fuss over the seals in Bering Sea, and the 'situation' (they always have one, I notice) in Europe doesn't bother me in the least." He threw the paper across to the other and arose to his feet. "You may read it if you wish. I want a breath of air." He turned away. "A confounded bore," he said to himself.

He stepped out on to the rear platform of the sleeper and stood leaning on the polished brass railing. The hoarse bellow of the locomotive whistle floated back to him as an ugly echo forcing itself into a realm of unreality, for the moonlight was spilling mystery and romance over prairies that sunlight would claim for the workaday world. Then he forgot the peaceful scene and saw the glaring lights of a Chicago railway station, saw the surging, restless throngs, and before him was a slender young

woman who smiled as she said, "You are very kind."

"Chump!"

He turned back into the car, but paused as he caught sight of his smoking-room companion standing with his lips close to the ear of the porter. Then some silver passed to the darky's hand and the stranger made a slight gesture toward the rear platform; the porter nodded, and they separated.

Phil entered the car and found all of the berths made up. Making his way down the dim, curtained aisle, he found his number and went to bed. After turning out the berth light, he lay for some time wondering what was behind the conference between the stranger and the porter. He had raised the window curtain, and the romance world was still unrolling itself before him on a ribbon of moonlight.

"You are very kind!" Clickety-click-clickety-click, sounded the wheels on the rails, and the transaction between the porter and the stranger was forgotten. "You are very kind!" A small voice piped it to him from the moonlight.

"Chump!" he muttered again, half savagely, and pulled down the curtain.

CHAPTER II

A NOTE OF WARNING

PHIL slept late the next morning, and when he poked his head out between the heavy curtains he found that most of the other passengers in the car were already up. After the usual amount of squirming and mishaps he got into his clothes and stepped out into the aisle, his collar and cravat in hand, and turned toward the wash-room.

Casually he ran his eyes over his fellow-passengers. There was the usual irascible man who quarrelled with the porter because the train was late; there was the conductor bent over his tickets in a seat across the aisle, sorting them and making notations in his report sheet; and there was the fussy woman who always explored the recesses of her suit case for the edification of the other passengers. He smiled and pursued his unsteady way. But suddenly he felt a tiny little thrill as the door of one of the drawing-room sections was jarred open by the train's motion and he saw, beyond, the room's

sole occupant, a girl in a gray dress. At the same instant she arose to close the door, and for one flash his eyes looked into hers. Then the door was latched and he found himself treading the narrow passageway that led to water and towels.

The picture the mirror gave him caused vexed mutterings, for he saw that his hair was tousled and his coat collar turned up at one side in a most unpretty manner. Mentally he swore that never again would he be guilty of emerging from his berth without first putting on his collar and taking a look into the panel mirror. "What a sight she must have thought me!" So ran his mind. But it is probable that his vanity would have suffered a still greater shock had he known that at that moment the girl in gray was giving him no thought at all.

Instead, she was reading a letter written in a man's bold chirography and signed, "Devotedly, Joe." And when she had finished reading she leaned back in her seat and gazed long out at the passing scenes, which she failed to see, for in her eyes was a shadow.

But Mr. Philip Elmore knew naught of this as he splashed in the tepid water and increased

the Pullman company's laundry bill scandalously. He had been troubled with dreams in which a long procession of sad-eyed immigrants plodded past his pillow and then disappeared in a jostling crowd, from which occasionally peeped a face that was good to look upon, cheeks that baffled analysis of color and left the beholder content to simply admire their splendor without attempting description, and eyes that needed not the help of a tongue should the owner desire to impart a message. He groomed himself with great care, and after keeping the porter flicking at molecules of dust he passed that dusky highwayman a piece of silver that caused him to seize Elmore's hat for another vigorous dusting.

"Never mind the hat," said Phil. He took a silver dollar from his pocket. "There is a young lady — in gray — in this first drawing-room. Do you know if she goes beyond St. Louis?"

The darky's eyes rested on the silver.

"Yes, suh, she does."

The dollar was shifted until it was balanced on one finger and held at arm's length.

"Where to?"

"Fort Smith, Arkansas, suh."

The dollar slid from the finger, but it did not reach the floor. Neither did it ever again touch Philip Elmore's fingers, so far as is known.

"What road is that on?"

"De 'Frisco."

The "Courier" man turned away and stepped out on to the platform for another breath of air. A smile was on his lips and remained there until it disappeared in a slight pucker as he whistled a merry extract from a comic opera hit. His ticket to Austin read via the 'Frisco.

His smoking-room acquaintance of the night before came out and joined him.

"A beautiful morning."

A nod, but no break in the whistling.

"Day promises to be warm, but I suppose it's nothing to what I'll find when I hit Texas."

The whistling ceased, and the whistler looked at the other in a perplexed way.

"I'm going to Dallas," continued the stranger, calmly. "And it's evident we'll get in too late to catch that morning 'Frisco."

Elmore frowned. Just why, he did not know, but he did not relish having this fellow fastened to him during his journey. He had put him

down as a specimen of the *genus* nuisance that is to be found on every train and that is a continual vexation to the spirit.

"St. Louis isn't a bad town to lie over in," replied Phil. "And there'll be a cracking ball game there to-day. The Highlanders are scheduled."

"I don't care much for that sort of a game, myself. I am interested in railroads — and they offer a bigger game."

"No doubt you are right, but — "

"Ah, yes, such a game — such a game! Sometimes players even take a life to win!"

Elmore looked around and found his companion directing a steady gaze at him.

"Same in baseball," he responded carelessly. "I never encouraged mobbing the umpire, though I'll confess to having thrown a few pop bottles at him."

"Young man, you're a cool one," and the stranger smiled as he turned back into the car, leaving Phil staring after him, perplexed.

"It's going to be pleasant to have that cracked-brain on this trip," he mused. "Maybe he'll miss that train to-night."

A glance at his watch showed him that they would miss the morning train by an hour at

the least. He went back to his seat in the car. The door of the drawing-room occupied by the girl in gray remained closed, and he turned to the window. The train was now crossing the bridge, and the muddy Mississippi flowed beneath. Freight packets splashed and churned the water with their mammoth stern wheels, and up the stream came the *War Eagle* with her daily load of excursionists bound for a day of pleasure at some of the numerous parks to be found along the river. On her deck a band was playing, and hundreds of handkerchiefs fluttered in salute to the train as the boat forged on its way.

Soon the train was on the St. Louis side and hurrying along the elevated tracks on the river front, the travellers forming a not altogether pleasing acquaintance with second-story squalor and dirty washings hung out on tarred roofs to dry amid the soot and grime of countless locomotives that puffed by.

At Washington Avenue the stranger who had confided to Elmore his interest in railroads left the train, which rushed on, after a brief pause. But with luck one can take a street car at Washington Avenue and beat a railroad train to the union depot, and if the truth was

known, that is exactly what the stranger did on that morning. He was joined at the Avenue by another man, to whom he gave some brief words as they ran to catch a car, and to whom he gave more minute explanations and instructions after they were on the car. But Elmore knew nothing of this, nor is it likely that he would have given it more than passing heed had he known it.

Philip Elmore was thoroughly debonair. To him shadows rarely brought gloom, for he knew that somewhere the sun must be shining, else there could be no shadow. Therefore, he looked for the sunshine and ignored the shadow. In fact, it was this very quality that had led to his uncle's dictum that he must go to work, that he must "make good," in the parlance of the day, if he hoped to inherit those Tennessee acres held in fee simple by Judge Philip Jordan, who now had neither wife nor child living, and in whose honor Philip Elmore had been named.

Philip's father had been thrown from his horse while riding to hounds, and died a few days later, bequeathing to that infant naught but a passion for fox-chasing. The young mother had taken her boy to the home of her brother, Judge Jordan, and a year later there

was another mound in the little family cemetery, and Laura Jordan-Elmore slept under the stone, dead of a broken heart; for she had loved with all the intensity of her nature the handsome Leslie Elmore, who had wooed her so ardently and won her by his inflexible honor and the blitheness of his nature. And in his uncle's home Philip grew to manhood. He remembered little of his father or his mother, though there were baffling images that clung to the dimmest recesses of his memory, images he knew to be those of his parents, though he could never get the lines clearly drawn.

True, on a wall in the drawing-room of his Uncle Philip's home there hung portraits of a man and a woman, who, he had been told, were they to whom he owed life; but these were rather crude bits of crayon work executed by an "artist" who had been employed to enlarge the old daguerrotypes. This "artist" had disappeared soon after receiving the daguerrotypes, and it was only after Philip Jordan had chased him a hundred miles that he secured at the pistol's muzzle the enlarged portraits. The original pictures the fellow had lost, and it was only rare good fortune that he had not destroyed the crayon pictures. So Judge

Jordan had taken those, and after kicking the "artist" out of the little room in which he found him, he went out into the hall and kicked him back into the room again and flung a gold piece in after him. Then he had had the pictures of his well-beloved sister and her husband framed and hung on his wall.

His mother was beautiful. Philip knew that; knew it from that dim picture on the wall of his memory; knew it without the repeated telling by his uncle; and that his father was honorable and respected by all men in spite of his lack of thrift he also came to know. And so he loved and revered the memory of these two, the father who had bequeathed to him a sunny nature, an honor that could not be sullied, and a passion for the cry of the pack on the scent of a fox; and the mother who had given to him a gentleness of manner that always was discernible, and a smouldering fire of nature that had never yet become flame because the right breath had not fanned it, but which would sweep all before it when once the flame took life.

Through his youth and college days Philip had been what his father had been, and it grieved the lonely old master of the Jordan

plantation, who longed to see the boy he loved develop into a man capable of assuming the responsibilities that would come to him as master of the Jordan acres. And so it was that with a show of gruffness that belied the tender love in his heart he had declared to Phil that he must prove his mettle. The boy had not taken as kindly to law as the Judge had hoped, but had shown a fondness for pad and pencil. In his college days he had sought and obtained the editorship of the university paper, and the work had lain close to his heart. Therefore, when Judge Jordan had stormed (to cover the quaver in his voice) in the library that day, young Philip had chosen newspaper work.

"Very well. Secure a position on a reputable paper and hold it with credit for a year — and then we'll talk it over."

So had Judge Jordan spoken, and with the utmost good cheer in his heart Philip had gone to Chicago, that marvel of the North, and finally had secured his chance on the "Courier." That he had "made good" was evidenced by his assignment to his present mission.

True to expectations, when the train finally backed in under the union station sheds, it was

too late to make the desired connection, and Elmore, heartily ashamed of himself for prying into the affairs of the girl in gray, tried to make amends with his conscience by being the first one off the car, and walking directly away from the steps without once looking back. It was a struggle, but he did it.

"Remember the fate of Lot's wife, old man. No pillar of salt for you, even for the gray dress."

He laughed as he thus admonished himself, and kept his face to the front. The suit case he gave into the doubtful care of the parcel checker, and then strolled out to Market Street and halted at the curb in indecision. This stay in St. Louis had not been among his calculations when he started on the journey, and he had not yet matured his plans. Should it be an up-town café for a late breakfast, and then a morning ramble in Forest Park, where he could be close to Nature, or should it be a hotel and a loaf in the smoking-room? In either case it would be baseball in the afternoon, for the Highlanders —

The train of thought was wrecked at that moment by the sight of a gray-clad figure signalling a cabman. A moment later the

door had closed behind her, and the driver was unweighting his horses and gathering up the lines. As the cab moved away, Phil ran to another and jumped in.

"Keep that cab in sight and take me to the same hotel," he ordered, as though there were no doubt that a hotel was her destination.

Away they rattled, dodging trucks and cars until Twelfth Street was reached, when the driver of the leading cab evidently tired of the vexatious driving, for he turned north to Chestnut, where no car line runs, and then eastward again. But those few blocks had jolted several very commendable thoughts into Philip Elmore's mind.

"You're a confounded cad, Phil, to follow her thus!" he exclaimed, as he signalled the driver. "I've changed my mind," he called. "Turn north on Tenth and drive me around the post-office twice."

The driver stared in amazement.

"I — of course — would you mind saying that again, sir? I — my hearing's a little off, sir."

Philip repeated the order slowly and with labored distinctness.

"Around the post-office twice, understand.

Now drive on." He settled back in the cushions and smiled. "She ought to be effectually lost by that time," he muttered.

The vehicle swung north and presently passed the west side of the post-office. Then the circle of it was completed, but as the driver turned into Tenth again for the second journey past the building he pulled up close to where a policeman stood on the curbing, idly swinging his club. The horses were slowed to a walk, and for a moment the driver debated as to the advisability of calling the officer to take care of his crazy fare. But he clucked and his horses trotted onward again. After all, what mattered it to cabby if his fare chose to be a fool? Doubtless he would pay the bill. The corner of Tenth and Olive again. The driver turned to Elmore.

"What next?" he asked, much as if he expected to receive orders to drive up the Exposition steps.

"The Southern," was the brief order.

A few minutes later cabby dropped his strange fare at the Broadway entrance of the hotel, and, tucking his fee into his pocket, drove away again, muttering over and over, "Well, I'll be damned!"

Phil glanced about the lobby. Not a gray dress in sight, and he breathed easier, for his conscience was free from reproaches now. But he found himself eagerly reading the register. There was a goodly number of feminine names under that morning's division, — women from Indiana, women from California, women from Wisconsin, but not a woman from Chicago. And again Mr. Philip Elmore was glad. He partook of a hearty breakfast and smoked his cigar with a very comfortable feeling of virtue because he had not found her. True, he had inspected the register very closely and had made some mental calculations on the ages of some of the women guests as judged by their chirography, but — well — he had not *found* her, so of course there was no occasion for conscience to stab him.

But he *had* bribed his way to a knowledge of her destination and her route! He could not forget that he had done this thing. He wished he could forget it. But, like a grinning skeleton, it danced at his side up and down Broadway, it lunched with him, and it capered about on the diamond before his eyes that afternoon as he arose in the grand stand to shriek advice to the man trying to steal second base.

"Well, old man, you'll not tell of that bit of weakness when you get back to Tennessee," he muttered, when the evening had come and the electric lights were beginning to splutter. "Maybe it would be the decent thing for you to miss the train to-night and wait until morning."

But he did not. Instead, he carefully consulted his watch and a time-table and then decided to dine at the Union Station. "That's some penance," he thought.

At the station he sauntered about the waiting-rooms for a time, once more keenly interested in the human kaleidoscope, after which he went to the dining room and devoted himself to the menu and an evening paper. He had almost finished when he chanced to raise his eyes to a mirror a short distance in front of him. Idly he surveyed the groups behind him reflected in the mirror, and then he suddenly thrust the paper before his eyes for a moment, only to slowly and cautiously lower it until he could barely glance over its top and look into the glass. In a far corner behind him was a girl — *the* girl — in a gray gown, and she was watching him very intently, though it was evident she was not aware of the mirror.

On her face was plainly written concern, doubt, perplexity.

"What the deuce ails her?" he wondered.

He saw her tear a slip off the menu folder, take a pencil from her purse and bend over the paper. Calling a waiter, she paid her bill, after which she handed the girl the folded slip, said a few words to her, nodded toward Elmore, passed a coin to her, and hurriedly left the dining room as the waiter approached Phil's table. A deft arranging of the dishes, and the servant laid the folded paper before him, and turned away without a word as the astonished man picked it up. A look of amazement and utter bewilderment came to his face as he unfolded the paper and found these words pencilled there:

"Caution. Two men watch your every move."

There was no signature. Elmore was nonplussed. He read the note a dozen times, each time becoming more and more hopelessly lost in the fog. His impulse was to tear it up, but instead, he folded the paper and tucked it down beside his watch in his vest pocket. Once more he dallied with his coffee, and as he did so he studied all the faces he could see

in the mirror. Not a familiar one was visible, nor could he trap any suspicious actions. He arose and glanced nonchalantly about the room, but no reward was his. Simply the average run of patrons, some going, some coming, some dining, none giving him heed that he could detect.

"Well, shade of Sherlock, here's a go!" he muttered, as he strolled out into the waiting-room again.

The gray dress was nowhere to be seen, and he walked aimlessly about for a while. What it all meant he had no idea, but the mystery of it began to get on his nerves a little, and in spite of the fact that he had never dodged a danger in all his life, he found himself looking with increased admiration on the stalwart policemen who occasionally passed him. It really was nice to have those big fellows so close at hand! Surely they could protect — He laughed. What a boy he was! Pooh! Phil Elmore had never sought help from any one. Unconsciously he threw his shoulders forward, and then back, and his arms swung slightly, just enough to please him as he noted the free play of his muscles.

Certainly he could care for himself. But

it was annoying, this thing of knowing that every blessed move was being watched by some one. Yes, by some one, but by whom? That fellow over yonder had looked at him in a peculiar way just now, and — ha! there was another scoundrel watching him! And was — Pshaw! He was peering suspiciously at every one, and every man he was conjuring into an enemy.

A hand was laid on his arm and he whirled, his fist clenched, but it was only a gawky youth from the rural districts.

"Mister, c'n you-all tell me whar I'll find the train to Brush Creek, Missouri?"

"Confound it, no! I'm no — Beg pardon, son. I'm a little nervous, I suspect. Yonder's the depot master. Ask him."

He laughed a little jerkily as the youth plunged toward the official. And then he took up the old train of thought. What did this dainty little creature know of thugs and like gentry? It was very puzzling, all of it, and not at all pleasing. A slight smile came to his lips. There was one phase of it that pleased him — the fact that she had undoubtedly bestowed upon him some attention, else she could not have warned him. And it was evident that

she believed that she had given him this warning without his having any idea as to the author of it. But the mirror had decided otherwise. It was near time to board his train, and he went to the parcel room after his suit case. Five minutes later he found himself in the crush about the gates.

It was pleasant to think that she had bestowed her attention upon him, and his humor was mellowing. "Only I hope she forgets the picture I must have made collarless and with tousled hair," he mused. But, really, it was all absurd. Why, he had no idea who she was, and a few hours' journey would end their little drama, if such it could be called. Well—

In the crush he was roughly jostled, and at the same instant he felt a hand in his watch pocket. Dropping his suit case, he clutched at the hand too late, but as he whirled he saw a man endeavor to break through the crowd and escape. Like a flash Elmore's clenched fist shot out and landed on the fellow's jaw, sending him crashing against those about him.

Immediately chaos reigned as the crowd surged about the men and then scattered, but the pickpocket managed to squirm through the mass, and when Phil succeeded in breaking

loose from those who had sought to stop what they took to be a common brawl, the fellow had disappeared.

"A pickpocket at work," explained Elmore to the policeman who ran to him. "But he didn't get my watch, after all," he added, feeling in his pocket.

He picked up his suit case and walked on out toward his train, but a sudden thought caused him to pause and search his watch-pocket again.

"So, it wasn't my watch, but *that!*" he exclaimed.

The note from the girl in gray had been stolen from his pocket!

CHAPTER III

THE GIRL IN GRAY

CONFLICTING thoughts held carnival in Philip Elmore's brain as the Limited rushed on through the night. He was experiencing an odd feeling of pleasure because he had found the girl in gray occupying a section in the same sleeper to which he had been assigned, and he was vexed to an equal degree to be greeted by his smoking-room acquaintance of the night before. And to add to his brain riot, there was the incident in the St. Louis Union Station.

The girl did not so much as glance at him as he entered the car, but in the smoking-room he found the railway man all smiles.

"Well, here we are again on the same car, three of us," was the stranger's greeting.

"Yes, you and I are here — but one and one do not make three."

It cannot be said that Elmore's tone or manner was engaging.

"No, but add one to that sum and you have

three — the third being a charming young lady in a gray dress."

"Indeed? I hadn't noticed any such lady." He lied unconcernedly.

"Perhaps not, but she's here just the same. Left Chicago on the same car. If I had your youth, I'd make her acquaintance somehow."

Phil sought to end the conversation by devoting himself to his cigar and looking steadily out of the window at the world of blackness. He wanted to smoke; his nerves had been given a twitch, and a cigar was soothing; but if this nuisance persisted, he would have to give it up and seek his section.

"Strange, isn't it, that we three should meet again on the same car? Very strange."

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Phil. "I once saw a friend of mine draw a jack of clubs five times in succession in a poker game while trying to 'fill.'"

"And the jack was just what he wanted?"

"No! He was trying for a queen."

He threw away his cigar and stalked out of the room in a heat of temper. Once more back in his section, he kicked at his suit case and said savage things to himself.

The girl occupied a section toward the front

of the car, while his was in the rear. She was resting her head on the back of the seat and looking out of the window. It was a provokingly pretty picture, and the Tennesseean straightway forgot his vexation. But why should she be such an iceberg? Why not unbend just a trifle so he could bow to her and thank her for her warning? More nonsense, and he knew it. She was not the sort to gather acquaintanceships on a railway train. Once or twice he resolved to go boldly forward and speak to her, at all hazards. Surely his gratitude warranted it. But he did not. Once he started determinedly, but he passed by her seat and stood in the front vestibule awhile, exhausting his vocabulary of ridicule on himself. Then he set his teeth firmly and with his mind fully decided as to what he would say, he marched back into the car. For just an instant he wavered at her section, and then fled down the aisle at a rapid pace, and sank into his own seat to search his brain diligently for some particular sort of fool he had not already called himself. He gave it up.

During that instant of hesitation he had looked full into her face, — he wondered if she would term it an impudent stare, — but

not a quiver of those long dark lashes had betrayed her knowledge of his existence; not a twitch of those red lips had hinted that she might be aware that it was not the porter who had paused beside her. It was very vexing and humiliating.

But she was good to look upon! And if he were to take to writing sonnets to her, how should he refer to her complexion? He rummaged his lexicon, taking up, one after another, the beauty adjectives and promptly discarding them. Olive? No. Rosy? Humph! That smacked of red hair. Dark? Insipid — and untrue. Lily? He groaned and desisted. Clearly, the word had not been coined with which to picture in one breath the delicious tints glowing in that delicately rounded cheek. But the porter was hanging curtains, pulling pillows from hidden recesses, and waving sheets about the aisle in a most unsentimental manner, and Phil retreated once more to the smoking-room.

His pillow was free from dreams that night, for weariness had claimed him for its own, though he awoke once or twice and knew by the labored puffing of the engine that the train was climbing the Ozarks. On the mor-

row the girl would leave this panting monster and — From somewhere came a heavy, sonorous snore. The brute! Men who snore ought to be refused sleeper tickets! Then he sank again into slumber, and when he awoke, sunbeams were showing beneath his lowered window shade. The train was motionless, and raising the shade a tiny bit, he peeped out. Rugged mountains reared themselves in the perspective, and the odor of pines came to him through the window. His watch told him it was near to seven o'clock.

Voices sounded close beside the car and he caught fragments of sentences: ". . . leg broke when they got him out of . . . ten cars . . . two dead." People were moving about in the car, and peeping out, he saw that several were up and dressed. Realizing that there had been an accident of some kind, he pushed the call button, and finally the porter thrust his head between the curtains.

"What's the trouble?"

"Freight train smashed through a bridge, and cars piled all over the mountains."

The electric bell was ringing furiously again, and the darky disappeared, while Elmore made several remarks under his breath that failed to

help the matter one bit. Then he dressed, taking care to don collar and cravat, and sallied forth. Curtains still hid the Girl.

The porter was right. Just ahead was a long freight, and the front was a mass of wreckage, with cars piled in indescribable confusion. A group of men was about the baggage car, and he found a begrimed, groaning brakeman being lifted into it, while other men were bearing toward the car silent, limp forms, with coats thrown over the features. He turned away and went on to where he could view the wreck. The ponderous engine had plunged through a culvert spanning a small mountain stream, and a mass of splintered wood and twisted iron was all that remained of the first ten cars. Clearly, it would be many hours before trains could pass that spot, the mountains that rose abruptly on either side of the track prohibiting the laying of a temporary track around the wreck.

"The land frauds will be ancient history before I reach Texas," growled the "Courier" man, but he little guessed how near he was coming to the truth.

Presently the conductor of the Limited came hurrying back, and began calling, "All aboard!" The call was taken up by porters and brakemen,

and the inquisitive passengers who had been viewing the wreck came swarming back.

"We'll back up to the first station and get a doctor for that brakeman," explained the conductor.

The station proved to be nothing more than a small cluster of houses perched on a mountain slope, and with one store and the depot. Over the ticket window was the familiar blue-lettered sign, "Western Union Telegraph Office," but when the passengers crowded about and clamored to have business and other messages rushed out, the operator stolidly declined to receive them, declaring that the line would be busy for some time with railroad orders.

The girl in gray strolled up and down the platform, and Phil forgot to grumble as he watched her, taking care that she should not trap an impudent stare. She was rather taller than he had at first thought, and she walked the length of the platform with a grace born of absolute freedom from self-consciousness. And her milliner had rare good taste, said the man as he noted the modest creation that adorned her head, a bird wing here, a small cluster of flowers there, a bit of lace intertwined to add to

the picture. There was that in her easy carriage, her poise, her health glow that bespoke the equestrienne, and the man found himself fitting her into another picture, — a moonlit picture framed with bold hills, with a pack in full cry after the fox, and the Girl — Diana she must be — astride (as a girl should ride) a thoroughbred that held fallen trees and rail fences in contempt, and with a man riding at her side. Of course a man must be riding there, else the picture would be but a daub on Fancy's canvas. And the man? Oh, the man in the picture was Philip Elmore.

"How far is it to Rogers?" he heard her ask of a native who was puffing a corncob pipe and staring at the long string of sleepers.

The man took his pipe in hand, spat with great deliberation at a car wheel, and answered:

"H'it's ten miles by railroad, seven miles as the crow flies, fifteen miles by wagon, an' dern near to the end o' the world if you walk."

He grinned at his own humor, and again devoted himself to the corncob. Elmore drew near and studiously viewed a lone pine on a distant mountain crag, his back to the girl.

"Then there is a wagon road from here there?"

"Wel-l-l, Miss, some calls h'it a road, an' some what ain't used to th' mountains calls h'it somethin' else, but I reckon h'it's a road."

"I would like to drive there. Is there a livery stable in the town?"

The mountaineer chuckled and spat at a grasshopper on a rail.

"Nary."

"Then perhaps I could hire some one else to drive me there."

"Huh! Reckon not, Miss. You see, h'it's mighty seldom that th' Limited stops here, an' the boys likes to look at the sleepers. They have the derndest queerest names, don't they? Don't reckon anybody would leave town on an *oc*-casion like this. The women folks'll be down pretty soon."

Phil went in search of the conductor.

"How long are we apt to be here?" he asked.

"Don't know. Several hours, though. You see, railroads ain't numerous in these mountains, and we can't détour."

Elmore made his way to the general store a

short distance away and found the storekeeper standing in his doorway, looking at the crowd about the station. No one else was about the place, but in front was a light spring wagon loaded with miscellaneous groceries.

"I'd like to inquire something about the driver of this rig," said Phil. "Of course you know him."

The storekeeper eyed the traveller with suspicion dawning in his eyes.

"Maybe I do, an' maybe I don't. We'uns ain't over inquisitive in these parts."

Phil laughed. "Probably I was too abrupt," he said. "But I was in a hurry and didn't think. I was merely wondering if I could hire him to make a drive for me."

"Humph! Which way?"

"To Rogers."

"Rogers? Dern it, ain't you got a ticket fer the train?"

"But it's stuck here for some time. I don't want to wait."

"Humph! Reckon you must be from the No'th, stranger."

"Yes — Chicago."

The storekeeper's face lighted up in an instant.

"Geewhilliker! Chicago? Say, I just wish my wife was here. She was up at Eureka Springs last fall and said that there was a young fellow there what lived in Chicago. He had a job in a big railroad office. Maybe you know him. Let's see, his name was Clarence — Clarence — I forget the rest. But I reckon he's well known, fer he travelled on a pass."

"No, I'm afraid I don't know him. You see, I haven't lived in Chicago very long."

"He was the politest kind of a chap, wife said, an' didn't put on sich a great sight of airs, considerin' that he travelled fer nothin'!"

"I'll try to hunt him up when I go back, and I'll tell him about you."

"That's right good of you, stranger. Just wish wife was here to talk to you. She learned a heap about Chicago. She talks about the Masonic Temple all the time, an' we sent off an' got a picture of it."

"Splendid idea. Wish I could find this driver." Phil looked about him.

"I'll find him for you if you'll wait until I lock up. I want to go up an' see the sleepers, anyway. You've seen the Masonic Temple yourself, I reckon."

"Several times."

"An' Clarence said that they had a garden way up there on the roof, but blamed if I can see how they'd ever git the dirt up there. Wife says they haul it up in elevators."

"Oh, they do many wonderful things in Chicago," laughed Phil.

"But a garden on a roof! Say, yonder's Lem Johnson, — the man you want to see, — yonder, back o' the depot, talkin' to th' man in a stiff hat."

They were close to the station, and Elmore saw that it was the smoking-room bore with whom Johnson was talking. The storekeeper called:

"Hey, Lem, here's a fellow lookin' for you." Elmore thought that Johnson looked rather startled. "Wants you to drive him over to Rogers."

Lem Johnson was a young man of about twenty-five, built like an athlete, smooth-shaven, garbed in a blue shirt and overalls, and wore a broad Stetson hat.

"Reckon you ort to know I ain't in that business, Sam," drawled the young man in reply. "Besides, I'm busy."

"No harm done, I reckon. Didn't know but you might be willin' to pick up a piece o' money."

Johnson's companion had flashed a sudden look of perplexity at Elmore at the storekeeper's announcement concerning a drive to Rogers. Then a peculiar gleam might have been noted in his eyes had one been watching. He smiled, and there was much of satisfaction in his smile.

"I was dickering with Johnson about some business matters, but if you'll just give me time for a short talk with him, perhaps it can be arranged. You see, my business can be settled quickly."

He led the young man away a short distance and for a few minutes they held an earnest conversation, during which Johnson glanced several times rather curiously at Elmore. Finally they nodded, as though in conclusion, and then came back to where the storekeeper was questioning Phil concerning Chicago.

"Reckon I might drive you over to Rogers, stranger, seein's how this gentleman ain't in any rush about his work. Sam," he turned to the storekeeper, "I can unload my stuff and get it later."

Elmore soon came to terms with him, and then took him aside.

"Look here, Johnson, you see that girl yonder in the gray dress?" Johnson nodded.

"She wants to go to Rogers, also. Now, you go tell her you heard a man say she wanted to go, and tell her you already have engaged to drive there, but have room for her if she wants to go. But do not tell her who it is. You may take my suit case down to the store, and I'll meet you there after you have picked up the girl."

The young mountaineer was quick of wit, and readily grasped the plan. It evidently amused him greatly, too, for he chuckled to himself as he took Elmore's suit case and strode off down to the store. There he unloaded his groceries and borrowed another spring seat from the storekeeper, and then, fully equipped for the journey, he drove back to the station. He accomplished his mission there with adroitness, and chuckled again as he helped the girl into what he termed the "hack," and carefully stowed her hand baggage under the seat. When he drew up in front of the store once more, Phil picked up his suit case and walked out to the hack, heartily ashamed of the game he had played.

"Well, they say all's fair in love and war. Maybe it isn't, — but it's comforting to say so at a time like this."

Then he raised his eyes and met those of the girl. The glow in her cheeks had deepened to a faint flush of red. She turned her face to the front while he stowed his suit case in the rear, and naught but indifference was in her manner, but he felt his own cheeks redden because of the assaults of his conscience. He turned to shake hands with the storekeeper.

"When you get back to Chicago and see Clarence, give him our regards," said the native. "By thunder, I'd like to see that garden! Wait — yonder comes the nigger porter on the run. Reckon he must want to see you."

Elmore looked around and saw the darky running toward them and waving aloft a yellow envelope, evidently a telegram.

"Telegram for Mrs. Philip Elmore!" he called.

"Who?" Phil gasped.

"Mrs. Elmore. Sent in care of the Limited, and it just got here."

Phil reached for the envelope.

"You mean —"

"Yes, it is for me," said the girl. "Thank you," and a coin dropped into the porter's hand.

Mr. Philip Elmore stood nonplussed, staring up into the face of the young lady who had

torn open the envelope and was reading the message. Evidently it brought no ill news, for she smiled as she read, a smile that revealed a flash of white teeth and a most cunning little dimple in the cheek that was toward him. But his brain was in a mad whirl at this sudden revelation of Fate's possibilities. *Mrs. Philip Elmore!* Was she a flippant baggage, after all, who had learned his name and was trying to make sport by claiming it as her own? Clearly this was not true, for there was a message from some place out in the great world, and it had come in her name.

"Reckon you'd better climb in, Mister, if we're to hit Rogers this morning," called the driver, and Phil mumbled something as he clambered into the vehicle and took a seat beside the girl. Then they rattled away down the crooked street.

"We meet in odd ways and places, — Dearborn Street station and grocery store in the Ozarks," said Elmore, turning to the girl.

She laughed pleasantly, and the music of it quickened his pulse a trifle.

"But I haven't lost my ticket this time," she replied.

The driver turned into a road that wound up the mountain and that was thickly strewn with rocks of generous size.

"Probably you'll be sorry you didn't before we reach Rogers, if this is a sample," he observed, as the vehicle climbed one of these rocks and then dropped down with a heavy jolt.

"Oh, I don't know. This isn't very much worse than some Chicago streets."

"I'm afraid you've been reading the papers that are 'ferninst' the administration."

He had forgotten his qualms of conscience in the charm of her manner. He liked her for her play of humor; he liked her for her quality of fitting into a situation nicely; he liked her for her freedom from stiff formality; he liked her because she was beyond all question a sensible young lady, healthy in mind as well as in body.

"I'll grant this much," she said, laughing and clutching at the side of the seat as the hack jolted over another rock, "if it is true that there are sermons in stones, this ought to be an enlightened community."

"Still, I prefer it to dawdling around that stuffy old sleeper, with the porter eternally trying to brush my hat."

"It is grand — this scene. Look at that little stream flashing along below us, and beyond the little valley the mountains, one peak tumbling over another. All we need now is an eagle circling around overhead to complete an ideal picture, such as poets dream and artists draw. But do you not think it would be well if we were introduced?"

"A most remarkable tumble, from mountain tops and soaring eagles to the dull world of flunkeys and drawing-room chatter — 'Miss De Something, may I present Mr. Van Nothing?' — or something equally fascinating. Names are a bore, sometimes. I met a willowy creature, one time, who I was certain was my affinity, but her name was Skinner, and somehow, that name and affinity could not agree. And she was worth half a million in her own right, too."

She laughed lightly.

"The trouble is you didn't see the name in the right place. It would have looked charming on a cheque."

"But wretched on a wedding card."

"Still, we must have names. All my *friends* have."

He thought it very cleverly worded, this

demand for his name, but it was not to his liking to give it. She was Mrs. Philip Elmore, of Chicago; should he tell her he was Mr. Philip Elmore, of Chicago? How impossible it seemed! Still, Fate threw her dice in strange ways. And she was married. Confound her brute of a husband, anyway!

Of course, no evidence had been forthcoming that her husband was a brute, but Mr. Philip Elmore, the present, felt that Mr. Philip Elmore, the absent, was a brute. To begin with, he must have shamefully deceived this girl in persuading her to become his wife, else she would have waited for — yes, it was a bit ridiculous, but — well — confound the fellow for slipping in ahead and taking an unfair advantage of the gentleman from Tennessee while the latter was engaged in the laudable sport of chasing foxes! And no one but a brute would let his wife fight her way alone through railway station mobs. But — happy thought! — perhaps the brute was dead!

Possibly it was somewhat ghoulish, but the thought was most satisfying. He turned it over and over and looked at it from all sides, and decided that the rascal had really had the grace and good sense to die. These thoughts

had been romping around through his brain ever since they had started on the drive, and while he had delayed as long as possible naming himself to her, he was not entirely displeased, because his deductions had proven the other Philip Elmore to be dead, and it was a very plausible theory that if she had liked the name when the first Elmore had gone a-wooing, she would still think it rather nice. Perfectly plain — and pleasant.

" Pray do not be shocked," he said, " but my name is Philip Elmore, of Chicago."

CHAPTER IV

THE MOUNTAIN TELEGRAPH

HE had quite expected the little gasp that escaped her, and the startled look that came into her face, but he was not prepared for the sudden flash of anger that shone in her eyes the next instant, nor for the chill of manner that came upon her. The red had flamed to her cheeks, and then it had slowly receded, leaving them deathly white.

"*You coward!*"

The words came from her lips like the snap of a whip, and the lash stung him.

"Coward? And why, pray?"

There was contempt in the look she turned upon him.

"To pose before me! To force yourself on me thus — with that name! I believe the driver would horsewhip you should I ask it!"

Phil's jaws closed with a snap, and a dull red showed in his own cheeks at her words.

"If you crave excitement, you might ask it of

him. He's a husky-looking fellow — and I played half-back at Harvard!"

"Indeed? And whose name did you assume then?"

"My own. Permit me." He took a card from his case and handed it to her.

She took his card, and as she read the name the color began stealing back into her cheeks once more. He saw her lips twitching, and feared that she was on the verge of tears, but this delusion was dispelled a moment later when she burst into a peal of laughter that caused the driver to turn around and stare at her in amazement.

"Oh, I beg —"

She did not finish the sentence, but again gave way to laughter that was most bewildering to Elmore, who sat mute by her side, still with a tint of anger showing in his face.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Elmore," she said, at last. "I beg your pardon for insulting you as I did, and for this foolish laughter. But it is so droll — so droll!"

The merriment was still dancing in her eyes, and Phil felt the lines about his mouth softening gradually until his resentment melted in the glow of her presence, and he smiled in his old debonair way.

"It is rather odd—and amusing, too, of course, —for Mrs. Elmore to find herself in the Ozarks with Mr. Elmore."

"Yes, I was startled. I thought for a moment you had taken advantage of having heard my name when I got the telegram. It is very odd, certainly."

"Yes, your husband will be amazed when you write him of it."

Phil glanced at her as he spoke, and in her eyes he saw a light that baffled him.

"Yes, I must tell my husband. I imagine I can hear his exclamations."

His smile faded, and a curious feeling of disappointment came to him. The brute still lived, after all!

"Then your husband is not dead?"

"Indeed, I am not a widow! I do not see—"

"Oh, I just hoped — I mean — I thought — why, I read in the paper about a year ago of the death of Philip Elmore. Of course it made an impression on me — the name, you know — and the paper said he left a young wife."

The happy thought came to him in his embarrassment, and he seized it greedily, and lied with what he believed was great skill. He

turned toward her with confidence, and found her looking at him with that baffling light — was it mockery, plain merriment, or what? — still dancing in her eyes.

"Poor man! There must be quite a colony of us in Chicago," she replied.

"Yes, I must consult the directory when I get back, if I ever survive this drive."

"And yet you followed a mountain trail up the St. Maries in Idaho, and even refused to perish in a snow-slide. Fie upon you for shrinking from the Ozarks!"

He turned to her in astonishment.

"How came you to know about that Idaho affair?"

"Do you imagine, sir, that I never read a paper? And if the 'Courier's' special correspondent has adventures in the Rockies, why should not the 'Courier's' readers know the tale?"

"True. Perfectly simple. I forgot that my name was in black brevier at the head of those articles."

"Then you really are Elmore, of the 'Courier'?"

"Yes."

"I thought so, but —" she turned her face

away from him — there are so many Philip Elmores in Chicago, you know, that I was not certain."

The team had toiled up a long grade to a plateau, pine-studded, and now, after half an hour's trot along this comparatively level road, another sharp ascent lay before them. Wild flowers dotted the mountain sides, and the dogwood was hanging its bloom close beside the narrow road that wound its apparently aimless way upward, ever upward. Perhaps it was the ozone of the mountains that set his pulse a-dancing; and perhaps it was not. It may have been the glowing cheek beside him, the soft voice that directed his attention to the smiling valley below them and to the bold peaks and rugged walls above them and beyond them. The way grew rougher, and soon Elmore saw that the road had disappeared, and that they were following a tortuous way but dimly marked amid the rocks.

"Haven't lost the road, have you?" he called to the driver, and then laughed at his own question.

"This here is a short cut that'll save us a heap o' travellin'," replied Johnson, looking back over his shoulder. "It'll be more com-

fortabler soon." There was a shadow of mirth in his tone.

"I still vote for this in preference to a day at that station," said Phil. "Gracious, that sleeper crowd will be ready to riot with each other in a few hours."

"But I shall not feel any staggering disappointment when we sight Rogers," returned the girl.

Then Phil sobered. Rogers was to end it all. He had forgotten that. He had pictured them toiling up through these mountains to some fairy spot, where the sun would always shine, and where no echo of the world would come; where there would be music — her voice —and laughter—her laughter. He had known her but thirty-six hours? Pooh! He had known her for ages. He had merely been separated from her for a while. Yes, that was all. But in that separation another man had won her and married her. The brute! The remembrance of this chilled his glowing fancy considerably. Probably it was well that Rogers was not many miles away.

"Whoa!" The driver set the brake firmly and sprang to the ground.

"Hold the lines a minute," he said to Elmore.

Then Johnson crept out on to an overhanging cliff, reached into the hollow of a log and drew forth a hunting-horn. Placing this to the corner of his mouth in the curious way of the mountaineers, he sent a series of dolorous notes floating down through the valleys and across the hills. Two short notes were followed by a longer one; then a slight pause, and two long blasts preceded three short ones. Another moment of silence, and then from some unknown quarter came the subdued notes of another hunting-horn in reply.

"Well, I'll swear!" muttered Phil, watching and listening in amazement.

No pen can describe the peculiar, mournful tones of a hunting-horn, the soft, subdued notes that in some manner conquer space and carry their sound for an almost incredible distance. Toot, toot, toot, to-o-o-o-t! To-o-o-o-t, toot, to-o-o-o-t, toot, toot! Back and forth floated the notes, while in the hack the man and the girl sat silent. Finally Johnson tucked the horn back into the log and returned to the hack.

"A mighty queer serenade you gave us," remarked Phil, as the driver climbed back to his seat.

"I live across the mountain here a piece, an' was just signallin' home."

"Humph! A most successful mountain telegraph. No wire-tapping, either."

Elmore did not smile at his words. He was doing a bit of rapid thinking. Those mournful notes did not please him, somehow, and neither did the driver's explanation convince him.

"I've heard a heap about wireless telegraph. Reckon that cow-horn line ain't a bad one."

If there was aught of humor in Johnson's words, he gave no evidence of being aware of it himself, for in the glance he flashed at Phil and the girl over his shoulder there was much of cunning and triumph, but nothing of mirth.

"And you're a skilled operator, my friend," replied Elmore, and his admiration was not feigned. He knew something of winding a horn himself, and recognized a master when he heard him.

"Maybe we had better prepare for brigands," whispered the girl, leaning close to Phil, and smiling as she spoke. "This seems an ideal spot for them."

"Still, these are the Ozarks and not the Balkans," he answered. "And, besides, we are not missionaries. The Raisulis always choose missionaries, do they not?"

"Oh, of course I was joking — but I wish we were in Rogers."

Elmore made no reply. He was rather ill at ease himself, and was wishing that he had the revolver out of the suit case. The more he analyzed the situation the more he came to believe that Johnson had lied about the signals. If the fellow had had the horn with him, it would not have seemed so strange, but it was highly improbable that he kept the horn hidden there and had a system of signals arranged just for the very rare occasions when he was to drive to Rogers instead of going home.

"How far are we from Rogers?" he asked, touching the driver on the shoulder.

"Don't worry, stranger. You ain't so derned far from the place you've been lookin' for."

The answer was in a harsh voice, and Johnson touched the horses with the whip, and they plunged forward on a down grade, the vehicle swaying and jolting until the girl gave a slight scream of dismay as she clung to the seat. Phil leaned forward and clutched Johnson's arm.

"Pull up, you infernal idiot!" he shouted, in a rage.

Almost as though it had come as an echo to

his words, there was a sharp command from a clump of bushes:

"Halt!"

Into the road sprang a man with a Winchester at his shoulder, and the muzzle of the weapon covered Phil. Instantly the driver clapped on the brake and drew in on the lines.

"You're a natural-born commander, stranger. I'll stop," and Johnson turned to Elmore, grinning.

"H'ist your hands, Mister!" came the command from the man with the rifle.

Phil hesitated, and glanced at the girl. There was no color in her cheeks, but her voice was calm and even as she replied to his look.

"Obey. You are helpless, don't you see?"

He saw, but his fingers were twitching for a clutch at the throat of the grinning Johnson. However, the man behind the rifle looked as though he would have no hesitancy in pressing the trigger, and he was not the kind of a hero who would court sudden death just for the sake of administering very incomplete punishment to a rascal who had driven them into a trap. His hands went up.

"Sir — my purse!" The girl tossed it into the road as she spoke. "Will you please step

forward to receive my rings? One is a very pretty diamond and I dislike to toss it into the road!"

"By thunder, you're a gritty one, Miss! But keep your rings — and I don't want your purse." The fellow picked up the purse and handed it to her. "Keep your hands up," he added, as Phil, conscious of being in a very undignified attitude, began lowering his hands.

"Well, kindly inform us as to what you do want," said Elmore.

"Sure. I want you to just hop right down out o' that hack. Lem, see if he's got a gun on him. No? Well, you can lower them hands, then, Mister. A fellow never looks well in company holdin' his hands like that. Hop down, now — and help the lady out, too."

Phil did as he was bidden, and was conscious of a thrill of pleasure when the girl smiled into his eyes.

"It's just like a novel, isn't it, where all sorts of improbable things happen to the —" She paused, and a faint bit of red showed in her cheeks.

"To the heroine, and the—hero?" he added, and she nodded.

The man who had stopped them appeared in

high good humor. He was not an ill-favored rascal, and had not taken the trouble to don a mask. True, he was roughly dressed, but there was that in his clear gray eyes that bespoke a higher degree of intelligence than his speech would indicate.

"All right, Lem, unhitch," said the bandit.

Johnson drove the team to a small clearing and pulled the harness off the horses, leaving the bridles on. Then he led the horses back to the party.

"We're goin' to do some ridin'," said the rifleman, "but I ain't just sure how to accommodate the lady, seein's we hain't any skirt for her and no side-saddle."

"Supposing I sit here and enjoy the scenery while you go in search of the proper outfit," said the girl, seating herself on a boulder.

"By Jupiter! I reckon nothin' won't bluff you, Miss!"

"No — I reckon 'nothin' won't,'" she replied, imitating his speech, and smiling slightly. "And I don't know but your society is as good as that horn-tooting lout yonder."

She turned her eyes on Johnson, who shifted his feet uneasily as the other laughed at his expense.

"Well, I reckon you'll have to ride behind some one, seein's we hain't no saddle for you. You ain't right well acquainted with either of us, so we'll put you up behind your friend here."

"That ort to suit," broke in Johnson. "She's his wife."

Phil whirled on him as the girl sprang to her feet with a gasp.

"My wife? You lying—"

"Never mind no compliments. You are Philip Elmore, and this is Mrs. Philip Elmore. Of course you've pretended to be strangers to each other, but it's been known ever since you left Chicago, and—"

"Shut up, Lem!" commanded the leader, and the driver obeyed.

"But what is the cause of this outrage?" demanded Phil, hotly.

"Can't discuss it just now," was the reply. "You ain't neither one goin' to be hurt. But we're havin' too much talk an' not enough work. We'll have to blindfold you durin' our little ride, for you might get stuck on the scenery an' want to stop an' look at it too long. I'll use your handkerchief—maybe it's cleaner. An' that silk one in your pocket for the lady.

Now don't fight. There you are. Your turn, Mrs. Elmore. I'll be as gentle as a kitten."

As the handkerchiefs were bound over their eyes the girl instinctively stepped closer to Phil, and one hand rested on his arm.

"Don't let them separate us," she whispered.

"Now, here's your horse, Mister. It's a little awkward gettin' on blindfolded, but — there you are. Now, Miss — I mean Mrs. Elmore — put your foot in my hand, and I'll steady you."

In a moment she found herself sitting sideways behind Elmore, her hands clutching his arms. The bridle was not given to Phil, but the horse was led by one of the men. Then the strange journey was commenced, and but few words were spoken by any of the party. It was easy to tell when they were climbing a hill or descending one, and occasionally by the brushing of leaves against their faces the blindfolded ones knew they were threading their way through a thicket. But ever that gentle pressure on his arms was pleasing to Phil, and he forgot to be thankful when Lem informed him that they had not much farther to go.

Presently they halted a moment while one sent a blast from a hunting-horn echoing

through the hills. This was followed at short intervals by three other long notes, and then they rode onward again, descending. Another stretch of level territory was covered, and they rode on to a bridge, the stream below being a turbulent one, evidently, by the sound of the rush and the swirl and dash of the water. Almost immediately after crossing the stream the trail led upward again, and soon grew very steep, so much so that Phil's companion was compelled to cling to him still more firmly in order to hold her seat. The clasp of her hands sent a strange thrill through him, and he forgot that she was the wife of another. He remembered nothing except the fact that they were together by some strange freak of Fate's dice-box, and the low-spoken words of the men about them reminded him that they were apt to be together for some time.

What it was all about he had not the slightest idea. It seemed preposterous to think that they should be waylaid thus in the mountains of the free United States and carried away to some unknown place. The brigands — for such they would be called anywhere but in America — were not seeking gold, nor jewels, for they had refused the girl's purse and rings

and had not even searched him, except to note whether he bore any weapons. They could not be expecting ransom — or could it be possible that this was the secret? But if so, it was a ransom for the girl, for there was no one to ransom him. The thought brought a laugh to his lips. The absurdity of his having to be ransomed like a curled darling who had been stolen by gypsies! He laughed again.

"What's so derned funny, pardner?" asked one of the men, and Elmore could detect the note of suspicion in his voice.

"Oh, I was just thinking what a stir there will be in Washington when it is learned that I have disappeared. You may expect to find these mountains filled with Uncle Sam's soldiers, searching for me!"

The reply came from his lips in a spirit of humor, though he voiced it seriously enough. To his surprise it evidently made considerable impression on his captors, for he heard them talking together rather excitedly, though he could not catch their words.

"Was that serious, or a joke?" whispered the girl, leaning forward until her lips were close to his ear.

"The rankest joke I ever spoke," he replied

in a low tone. "But it seems to have struck something."

They had halted for a moment to rest their horses, which were panting heavily from the climb. The man who had stopped the hack rode up beside Phil.

"Pardner, we ain't noways a-scared of them soldiers o' yourn, so don't give yourself no happiness on that point."

Having delivered himself of this bit of defiance, he gave the order to move forward again, and once more the horses toiled upward along a rough and evidently narrow road.

"Can you imagine why we are prisoners?" asked the girl, again leaning forward.

"Haven't the faintest idea."

"Do you suppose it is money these men want?"

"They refused your purse."

"A trifle. Perhaps they wish to demand a price. My — I — have near relatives who could — afford — "

She paused, and, blindfolded though he was, Phil knew she was in confusion, and he liked her for the embarrassment. It is not pleasing to hear a girl calmly tell of wealth at her command.

"You might be worth a price to them — but why should they want me?"

"They dared not release you to spread the alarm. Don't you see? You were an extra, thrust upon their hands."

She spoke very coolly, and Phil felt a slight burning of the ears. She had accounted for him much as one does a stray dog that persists in tagging along. He made no reply, but began to believe that she might be right about it. In his pondering on the question of ransom he had become so amused at the thought of anyone demanding a price for him that he had forgotten to carry the theory farther and apply it to his companion. One of the men had said that the girl's name had been known ever since she left Chicago. Was it not possible, then, that it was a plot to abduct her and demand a price? If so, he had nothing whatever to do with it, except as he had been thrust upon their hands by reason of his being in her company. But what of the two men who were watching him in St. Louis, and who stole the note from his pocket? If it was she whom they wanted, why should they have watched him? Or did that incident bear any relation to the present adventure? He could see no way by which

the two could be connected, but he could not rid his mind of the belief that in some way the St. Louis affair and the present were connected.

"If we could only have read the message of that hunting-horn!" The girl was whispering again.

"There would have been a horn and a man lying somewhere near the foot of that precipice," answered Phil, savagely.

The girl laughed. "Horn and driver in one red burial blent," she paraphrased.

"Hope you will be just as gay when you have to sleep in a cave and live on bacon and herbs while the corresponding secretary of the Brigands' Guild carries on negotiations for your ransom."

"Do keep cheerful, Mr. Elmore. What is better for a summer vacation than getting back to Nature?"

"You're a brave girl, all right. Do you know, I think you would be a genuine chum for a man — "

"Hush, sir! I'll refuse to ride farther with you if you continue such speeches."

"I beg pardon — and I plead with you to consent to continue this ride."

"I will, on condition that you make no more such speeches to me — a married woman, you know. Otherwise, I will summon my groom and ride back home instanter."

A merry peal of laughter followed the words, and Phil found himself happy in the music of it. If only the bandage was off his eyes, so he could look over his shoulder and see her face! He knew it must be glowing; he knew that witchery was dancing in her eyes; he knew that the red of her lips must be a glory.

Again the horses were halted for a breathing spell, and when they once more moved forward, Elmore knew that the way was practically level. Soon the neigh of a horse was heard close by as they passed, and then they advanced at a trot for a minute. Voices were heard, and they halted, Phil and the girl sitting silently on their mount while those about them engaged in a spirited conversation, but in tones so low that the words could not be understood. The heavy growl of a dog broke in on the sound of voices, and the girl clutched quickly at Phil's arm.

"Down, Lady! Silence, Nero!" The growling ceased.

"Time to dismount," said a voice. "Here's

a place for your feet, Mrs. Elmore. Give me your hand — so — don't be afeard o' nothin'. Now, you swing down, pardner."

In a moment the girl had slipped from the horse's back, and Phil had swung himself from the saddle. He heard the horses being led away, and felt a hand fumbling with his blindfold. It slipped from his eyes, and he blinked uncertainly for a few moments until his eyes became accustomed to the bright sunlight.

The first thing he saw clearly was that the girl had also been given the use of her eyes, and now she stepped closer to him, as though confident of his ability to protect her. Ranged close about them were four or five men, one of whom held in leash two giant bloodhounds, which were straining at their chains, their muzzles toward the newcomers. Phil found that they were on a small plateau, seemingly at the apex of the mountains, for far away in any direction could be seen the lesser peaks and hills until the blue haze of the distance enwrapped them. A glance showed these things, and then their eyes rested on a house immediately before them, and an exclamation of amazement escaped Phil as he swept his gaze over it.

The house was nothing less than a castle in

size, and its outward appearance gave promise of great comfort, and possibly magnificence of a kind within. It was fully three stories in height, the lower story being faced with pine logs halved, and the upper stories being of rough stone, the entire effect showing that the architect who designed it was a true artist. Broad verandas extended along the front of the lower story, and the windows of the upper stories were shaded with the latest pattern of awnings. At one corner a tower arose to a height of about thirty feet above the rest of the building, there being many windows in this tower.

"What do you think of this?" asked the girl.

"I am puzzled," replied Phil, still staring. "Is it a castle on the Rhine, or a Chicago apartment house?"

It took but a moment for their eyes to take in these details, and even as they were speaking, a man and a woman appeared in the broad double doorway at the front, and stepped out on to the veranda. He was a man of about forty-five, not more than five feet and a half in height, very slight of build, with swarthy complexion, through which, however, a sickly pallor

showed. That he was of nervous temperament was shown by the manner in which he frequently raised his twitching fingers to his forehead, and brushed back his hair. His eyes continually shifted, and his gaze shot swiftly from one face to another. The woman beside him was a beautiful creature, a feminine creation of fire and hot blood. Taller than her companion, her figure was of the willowy type, and a fascinating pair of eyes gleamed lustrously from beneath delicately arched brows of black. A half-smile was on her perfectly chiselled lips as she stood looking at the two who had been brought captives to this strange place in the wilderness. As her eyes rested on Elmore there was a slight change in the smile on her lips. She swept him with her gaze, and it lingered on his broad shoulders, his tall frame; then her gaze shot to the girl beside him and lingered again. She turned to the man and said a few words in a low tone, and he nodded.

"Bring the strangers into the house," was his command, his words having a slight accent.

CHAPTER V

THE CASTLE OF DAWN

THE leader of the men touched Phil on the arm and nodded toward the house, and with the girl half a pace in front of him the young man followed the mountaineer up the broad stone steps to the veranda where the man and the woman still stood.

"That will do, Daniel," said the master of the house, addressing the mountaineer. "Please report to me in the library at three this afternoon. Will you honor me by entering?" he asked, bowing to the captives.

They entered the broad hallway, and found their footfalls deadened by a heavy rug. A mammoth lamp of highly polished brass was suspended by brass chains from a beam in the ceiling, and from a set of deer horns on the wall hung a hunting-horn, gold-tipped. Farther down the hallway a stairway led off to the right, the steps being broad, and carpeted with velvet Brussels. To the left was a spacious doorway leading into a large room, and with a wave of

the hand the host directed them to enter here. The floor was stained and highly polished, with a magnificent oriental rug in the centre. In one corner was a mission clock reaching halfway to the beam-studded ceiling, and near the doorway was a grand piano, with a cabinet near by overflowing with music. On the walls were oil paintings, all of them treating of foreign scenery or events. A mahogany table bearing a book or two completed the furnishings, except for a few comfortable-looking chairs.

"I beg you to be seated," said the sallow-cheeked man. "It is Mr. and Mrs. Philip Elmore, I believe."

"Let's put it differently," said Phil. "It is Mrs. Philip Elmore and Mr. Philip Elmore, both of Chicago."

The girl had sunk into a chair, and now was patting her foot nervously. She parted her lips as though to speak, but checked herself and said nothing. The mistress of the Castle was standing near the man, silently studying the newcomers, and continually her dark eyes wandered to Phil, and there was something indefinable in her eyes as she studied the athletic stranger.

"As you choose," responded the man. "I presume you already know me."

"Not unless you are the Lost Charley Ross."

The man looked puzzled, and Mrs. Philip Elmore, of Chicago, felt a smile on her lips.

"Charley Ross? Ross? I do not think I ever heard of him."

"Then perhaps you're the fellow who struck Billy Patterson."

Phil was enjoying the other's bewilderment.

"Struck? I have struck no one. I —"

His companion interrupted him with a few rapidly spoken words in a language strange to Phil. The man looked doubtful a moment, and then smiled.

"Ah, it is as Madame says. You are the joke-maker. Ah, yes, a maker of jokes."

"Well, maybe I am. Maybe I am the star joker for 'Puck,' 'Judge,' 'Punch,' and the rest of them, but I'm tired of this kind of a joke. Your thugs have waylaid us and dragged us here; now what do you want?" Phil sprang to his feet in anger. "Who the devil are you?"

The master of the house showed no alarm, but stood half smiling still.

"I am the man you started out to find!"

It was now Phil's turn to stare in bewilderment, and with his hands jammed deep into his pockets he stood looking first at the man and then at the woman.

"I started out to find *you?*" he asked, in amazement.

"Undoubtedly. I was told you were a clever fellow, and I see it is true. But your cleverness has been matched, you see. You are like the fly that walks into the trap to get the sugar sprinkled there."

"And you are like the idiot who peers out through the barred windows and imagines he is Admiral Dewey. I never heard of you before, and do not know you now."

"If it pleases you to continue the farce — very well. But as you and Madame Elmore are to be our guests for some days — "

"Your guests? I think not!"

"It will be best to introduce ourselves," he continued, unheeding the interruption. "Madame Jean Le Foure, and myself, Jean Le Foure."

"We trust that our companionship shall be pleasant," said Madame Le Foure, and her lips bore a smile. "You must be weary. Shall I ring for tea — or wine?"

Her voice was soft and pleasing, and even enraged Phil said to himself that she was a beautiful creature.

"I cannot see the reason for this outrage!" stormed the girl from Chicago. "We never saw nor heard of you before. At least, I never did, and I do not believe Mr. Elmore did. It is some hideous mistake."

"I do not think so," responded Le Foure, "but even if it be error, it cannot be corrected now. It is a critical time and your release would result in the blocking of many plans that are just now ripening, no matter whether you are who we took you to be or not. You remain with us for a time."

"My trunk — "

"Will be safe wherever it is. Madame's wardrobe will be at your disposal."

"But my friends? My strange disappearance will torture them."

Le Foure and his wife consulted a moment. Then he turned to the girl.

"You persist in claiming we mistake. Very well. You shall write your friends — at my dictation — and the letter shall reach them."

"And are you going to submit so tamely?" demanded the girl of Phil.

That young man had been turning this very question over and over in his mind, but he could see no chance at present.

"I don't see anything left but submission," he answered. "I could knock this fellow down, or choke him to death, but —"

"But, outside, the dogs would take you, or Daniel would shoot you. Yes, Daniel is very faithful — and watchful." Le Foure had interrupted.

Phil walked to a window and looked out. The faithful and watchful Daniel was leaning against a pine tree in the yard, the butt of a Winchester resting on the toe of one boot. He was looking toward the house.

"If you will not have tea or wine, will it please you to be shown your rooms?"

Elmore looked at Madame a moment, studying how best to answer the question in view of the embarrassing complications.

"Mrs. Elmore must answer for herself," he replied, "for I beg you to remember that she is not my wife."

He shot a swift glance toward the girl, and saw the red burning in her cheeks. Then he walked to the window once more, and did not turn until after he had heard the ladies leave

the room. When he faced Le Foure, anger was again gripping him.

"See here," he demanded, "I want to have it out with you! I don't care who you are, nor why you think I have hunted you. Those idiots of yours have made a big blunder. We are prisoners here. That girl and I are almost strangers. Now what are our privileges, and what not?"

"Your privileges? Ah, they are many — almost as many as your wishes. Madame and I will try to make it very pleasant for both you and — the lady. Does she play? The piano is there. Does she paint? She will find brushes, palette, and all, in a cheerful room above. And the view from the windows — ah, Monsieur, it will inspire her! The grand peaks, the sunrises — if she be not fond of sleep — and the sunsets! I have seen them in Italy, Monsieur, and they were not more beautiful than here."

"And I?"

"Ah, I doubt not you have the skill in billiards. Above, I will put my skill against yours. The tables are very good. And there are cigars, pipes, and tobacco there. To all you are welcome. Breakfast you shall have in your room.

We lunch at one and dine at seven. Is it all hardship?"

"No, I'll be hanged if it is. On Clark Street they would call it a pipe dream."

"Monsieur knows, of course, I am not of his country. Its slang I do not all understand."

"You would have an American beaten if you did. When I get back to Chicago, I'll have a lot to learn. But I meant that it seemed too much to be true."

"Yes, you are surprised at this house — in these mountains, too."

Phil nodded.

"It was built a few years ago by one of your American millionaires. I do not know all of the story, myself, but he had a daughter, and the doctors said she must die, for there was something wrong here." He tapped his chest. "But the millionaire found this beautiful spot, and he hired many men to build this house. The pine logs and lumber came from the near-by mountains, and the rock — it is everywhere." He waved his hands toward the surrounding hills. "No wagon road reaches here, but pack-mules brought in the piano, the billiard tables, all the things from the outside world. And pack-mules bring provisions now."

"It is a beautiful place, I'll admit."

"Beautiful? Yes — You should see it at sunrise. You noticed the large glass ball at the top of the tower? No? It is the chief charm of the building — at dawn. The very first rays of the sunrise are caught there as the sun rises over the hills below us, and that great glass ball seems to burst into flame while one stands on the ground below in the shadows. It is marvellous, and very beautiful. The millionaire had strange fancies, and he called this the Castle of Dawn."

"But what became of him and his daughter?"

"It is very sad, the story. The girl grew strong here, and she came to care nothing for the world beyond these mountains. But she grew to love a young mountaineer, a young man unlettered and ignorant of all but these hills. But he had sturdy muscles, he was handsome in his strength, and so — she loved him. It is a way with women — to love the strong."

There was a note of melancholy in his voice, and for a moment his eyes dropped to his own thin frame and slender, weak hands.

"And then?" The newspaper instinct was manifesting itself.

"And then her father raved. It is a way

with fathers — to want to control their children's hearts. But she told her lover she would go away with him. One dark, stormy night she slipped away to meet him — and walked off a cliff. They found her body in the morning. Her lover went mad from it, and for months he was locked up in a madhouse, but finally he was given liberty, and now he roams the hills, generally at night, seeking her who was killed."

"Poor devil! He knew how to love, if he knew nothing else. It is a sad story, Le Foure."

"Very, very sad. And often when the storm comes in the night, the mountain people hear the mad lover out in the dark, crying out, 'Rosalie! Rosalie!' And the mountain people say that the cliff where she fell is haunted. I have heard them tell of seeing Rosalie there when the lightning played, her long hair falling over her shoulders, and a wild moan on her lips. They will not go near there in the night."

"Then the man gave up the place, and later you secured it?"

Le Foure nodded. "Yes, it was to my need and liking. But soon now will I go from it."

Again there was that note of melancholy, and

his restless eyes grew quieter, with a shadow of sadness in them.

"How much liberty are we permitted outside of the house?"

"As much as you choose to take in two hours' time. I must ask you to report every two hours, or Daniel will put the dogs on your trail. They are very good dogs, too."

"Damn you!" blazed Phil, springing to his feet. "Do you mean you would hunt us with dogs, as though we were slaves?"

"You asked, Monsieur."

"But listen to me! I'll escape from here and bring back a posse, and you'll do time for this!"

He strode to Le Foure and towered over him in a rage, his clenched fist raised. Le Foure smiled, and then suddenly placing his fingers to his lips, he blew a shrill whistle. The next moment there was a rush of feet in the hallway, and Daniel sprang into the room, with cocked rifle.

"What is it?" he asked, and the astonished Phil saw that the muzzle of the rifle was toward him.

"That will do, Daniel. I was just giving an object lesson. You see," said Le Foure, as the

mountaineer withdrew, "it would not be wise for you to strike. No word of mine could stay Daniel's trigger finger if you did. He is very faithful — and watchful. And do not try to run away, Monsieur. The country is very rough, and the dogs would overhaul you. And with the horn that hangs in the hall — or one like it, should you take that one — Daniel could sound a signal that would fill the hills with men who would not be kind to you."

"What sort of a sceptre do you wave over them?"

"Sceptre?" A light flashed into his dark eyes. "Ah, I wave no sceptre. But in these mountains are many brave fellows who like friends — and hate strangers. Revenue officers have come into the hills — and are sleeping here to-day. Those hunting-horns sound many messages to those who know the code."

"And if I should take to the hills, the signal would be that a revenue man was abroad, eh? And every man-jack of them would be trying to draw a bead on the stranger. Questions would be asked later."

"Monsieur sees a point quickly."

"Yes, I am marvellously acute," responded Phil, dryly. "Even when a schoolboy, I could

guess the subject of a picture drawn on a blackboard if it was labelled."

Le Foure studied the other's face for a moment or two, and a trace of doubt was in his look.

"You are — what you call it? — perplexing — to me. I think you joke again."

"Which proves that you, too, are very nimble of mind. Don't you know, my especial brand of humor is so subtle that but few people can follow it. You honor me by discovering some of my deepest jokes almost in a breath. I'll try to show you a joke that is a joke before we part for good."

"I would suggest that Monsieur does not forget the faithful Daniel — and the dogs — when he is ready for this big joke."

"No — it wouldn't be polite to slight them, would it?"

He laughed, and turning his back to Le Foure, walked again to the window. Daniel was once more at his post under the tree, but his eyes were not on that portion of the house where Phil and the master of the place were. Instead, his chin was elevated, and his gaze was fixed on something in an upper story, and an eager look was in his eyes.

"By Jove, he is really good-looking. I hadn't noticed it before," mused Phil.

Daniel was an interesting study. Rather tall, he was of powerful build, though his frame carried a trifle too much flesh for the perfect athlete. His head was well formed, Phil noticed for the first time, and the clear gray eyes, firm lips, and nose with just a hint of the eagle beak, all bespoke him as a man of intelligence. The hand that clasped the rifle barrel was tanned and sinewy, but as seen from the window, it did not appear heavy-knuckled, nor misshapen from toil. Yes, the faithful Daniel was likely to prove an interesting study, thought Phil.

"You are not American, I believe you told me." He turned again to Le Foure, who had dropped into a chair and was staring moodily at the floor. "Judging from your fondness for the 'Monsieurs' I take it you are French."

"I lived many years in France, but I have made the languages one of my pet studies. Is not my English good?"

"Excellent — so good that I could tell by that alone that you are not a native of this country. Madame is French, beyond a doubt."

"Yes — a Parisian. Why should I not tell you? We met at a dinner — one of those ar-

tists' affairs, you know, for Nanita was a pupil. But there! It cannot interest you. But you know a man is easily led into discussing his love affairs. I loved her from that night, Monsieur. Ah, she is a clever woman — a natural politician. Had she been born a man and an American, she would become President."

Plainly, Madame was this man's weakness or his strength, according to the circumstances. That he loved her with all the intensity of his nature was plain, for his eyes spoke of it and his pride in her.

"But as it is, she is the wife of an Ozark hermit."

A dull red showed in Le Foure's cheeks for a moment and his lips came together in a straight line. Then the muscles of his face relaxed, and one hand was flung out in a gesture typically French.

"It is not for much longer. Then perhaps Madame will come into — " He bit his lip. "I am a fool to speak thus to you," he added. "You either know much or nothing. Pooh! I care not which it is, but I should not gabble, though sometimes one's ears do delight in one's own voice. When one has long planned, one's tongue loves to anticipate a success."

"That's one touch of nature that makes the whole world kin. I can readily understand your eagerness to talk to some one — some one besides Daniel — after being cooped up in these mountains for months. But as I do not care a snap for your babbling, I suggest that you do it in French. That will relieve you and have no meaning to me. See how friendly I can be to my jailer."

"Then you do not understand French?"

There was an eagerness in his tone that did not escape Elmore.

"Well, I have learned what '*R.S.V.P.*' on an invitation means, and I sometimes treat myself and friends to '*au revoir*,' but beyond that I am as helpless as Daniel."

"Daniel? No, he is very faithful, but his language is often rough. He would not understand your *au revoir*."

"How came you by such a treasure?"

"Mutual need. I know nothing of his life before he came to us. One must not ask too many questions in these mountains. He has been tested and is very faithful. Perhaps the revenue officers — but I babble again. Daniel is very faithful. It is enough."

"Oh, surely. Quite enough. It makes of Daniel a brother to the bloodhounds."

Le Foure smiled. "Your tongue is sharp," he said. "But the dogs really are very devoted to him. But shall I show you your room? Perhaps Monsieur would like a bath. The mountain stream furnishes the water and the power that raises it to the roof tank."

Without a word Phil arose and followed the little man out into the hallway and up the stairs to the second floor. The stairway practically bisected the second floor of this strange castle. Across the east end of the house were two large rooms, which Le Foure explained were his and his wife's apartments, the north one being her sleeping room, and the south one his. Opening off of his room to the west was his library, the outer doors of which stood open now, revealing shelves laden with books, a long table on which were other books, several newspapers, and the usual complement of writing materials. Large leather-upholstered chairs were here and there in the spacious room, there was a roll-top business desk, and in one corner stood a large safe of standard make.

"I chose to have my library up here because it adjoins my bedroom. Often I am over my books and papers late. Then it is but a step to my bed. See!" He pressed a small oval

ornament on the casing of the connecting doors; they separated at the centre and rolled back almost noiselessly, revealing his luxuriously appointed sleeping room beyond. "A touch on the opposite casing closes them, and the spring operates the same from this room or my sleeping room. The man who built this house had clever ideas."

"It is almost unbelievable — in these mountains!" exclaimed Phil.

"Pooh! Monsieur should know that anything is believable if money is telling the tale. It took time and money, but with plenty of both — why not these conveniences here as elsewhere?"

"Of course. But at first it reminds one just a trifle of the Arabian Nights tales. By the way, is this library one of my privileges? I am fond of books."

There was a moment of hesitation, Le Foure's eyes searching the other's face closely, but evidently he saw nothing but indifference there, for he turned his gaze elsewhere, thrummed a moment on the table with his fingers, and then replied:

"You are welcome to come here and be comfortable with my books. Pardon my hesitation.

I must consider everything fully. Monsieur and I are enemies, you know."

Phil reflected a moment.

"By George, we are, aren't we?" he replied, laughing. "I don't know why we are, but it seems that we are. I had begun to feel that I was visiting a friend. Say, now, why the deuce *are* we enemies?"

Again Le Foure looked searchingly into his eyes, and again there was a shadow of uncertainty reflected in his own face. But only for a moment. Then he smiled, showing white, regular teeth behind the mask of thin lips.

"Monsieur — Elmore? — would be a favorite on the stage. He is a fine actor."

"Thanks for the suggestion. But would you mind introducing me to that mountain bath? I'd like to get rid of some of the dust I gathered while in company with Loyal Lem, Faithful Daniel, and the rest of the fraternity."

"Monsieur is light of spirit always. Ah-h!" A sigh escaped his lips, and again the melancholy showed in his eyes for a flash. "Come, your room is across the hall, beyond the stairway."

Between Madame Le Foure's room at the east of the building and the stairway was a con-

servatory in which there were palms and many flowering plants, it being separated from the hallway by dainty grill and lattice work, with a broad entrance to the nook, which was lighted by many windows. The apartments of the girl in gray, for as such Phil persisted in thinking of her, was directly across the hall from his own, and consisted of a reception room adjoining the library, with her sleeping room opening off this on the west. As they paused at the door of Phil's room, a large Angora cat came marching down the hallway and rubbed against the young man's legs affectionately.

"It is Mose," laughed Le Foure. "We all have our weaknesses. Mose is mine. He is a great companion, Monsieur — I can tell Mose so many things — and he never repeats them. He is very wise."

Phil laughed, and strode into the room. It was spacious, and furnished with the taste of a man who shunned garishness and wooed comfort.

"Your travelling case shall be sent to you at once. The bath will be made ready yonder." He pointed down the hallway, bowed, and hurried away.

Left to himself, Elmore went to the door and stood looking about, but all was quiet. And

just across the hall the girl in gray was sheltered! Not a sound came from her room. "Probably lying down," he thought. And Madame, too, was invisible. What a deucedly queer situation! He went to a window of his room and looked out at the panorama of rugged mountains, pine and oak-fringed, and over it all — solitude. With his back to the window, he was in the heart of modern civilization and surrounded by its comforts; facing the window, he was a speck in the wilderness.

Why had he been brought a prisoner to this strange place? Ay, he was a prisoner, even though the bonds were of silk and velvet! It was absurd! He, a stalwart man, tamely submitting to being held here against his will. *The hunting-horns sound many messages to those who know the code.* So Le Foure had said, and, in spite of the hurt to his pride, he knew it was true. If the dogs did not bring him to bay, the message of the horns would proclaim him a revenue officer, and the men of the illicit stills would swarm over the mountains in pursuit—and as a Tennesseean Philip Elmore knew a moonshiner's willingness to pick the trigger of a Winchester when a "revenuer" was in line with the sights.

But it was galling to be held here thus against his will! After all, the risk — His thoughts broke. From the room across the hall there came the sound of some one moving about. He studied the doorway and walls of that room a moment, and then his stern-set jaws relaxed and a smile played about his lips. Perhaps this thing of being a prisoner in the mountains might have its bright side, after all. The girl in gray was across the hall.

He whistled softly to himself, and dropped into a chair near the window, watching the spotless curtain sway in the breeze that stole in from the pines, filling his lungs with the ozone.

There was a light tap at his door, and he turned to see a Japanese servant with his suit case. The servant entered, set the case beside Phil, and then turned away. At the door he paused.

"Bath soon," he said, and disappeared down the hallway.

CHAPTER VI

THE SIX-SHOOTER BRAND

LUNCHEON was a solemn and formal affair. Mrs. Elmore declined to appear, and one of the silent little Japanese servants was sent to her room with the tray. Le Foure and his wife were very reticent, and Phil paid them but little heed. Once or twice Madame addressed her husband in French, and he replied briefly, but though it must be confessed that Mr. Elmore had absorbed a fair knowledge of that language during his school days, he now gave not the slightest sign of understanding a word that was spoken.

After the dismal ceremony of eating what was placed before them had been finished, Madame excused herself and disappeared up the stairway. Phil suggested a game of billiards, and Le Foure consented.

On the third floor Elmore found a handsomely equipped billiard room at the opposite side of the house from Madame's studio, where Le Foure pointed out various canvases bearing

proof of the lady's skill with the brush. The game was played listlessly, and it was evident that neither man was caring for it. Finally, Phil turned to the rack and replaced his cue.

"It's a farce, this game," he said. "I feel more like taking you by the throat than knocking ivory balls about."

"By the throat?" Le Foure smiled faintly. "You are very strong and I am not. Why do you not do so?"

Phil leaned against the table and puffed meditatively at a cigar, looking the other over in a calculating manner.

"I'm blessed if I know why I don't. It would be easy — 'dead easy,' as they say in Chicago. But I just don't."

"Perhaps Daniel —"

"Shut up!" He suddenly straightened up. "Don't give me any more of 'faithful Daniel,' or I'll surely muss up the furniture with you just to get a chance to smash Dan's halo."

"Your temper is bad. Still, I do not hold it against you. But I will go to my library and you may roam at your pleasure. The cigars — here, the wine — yonder."

Le Foure smiled again and turned away.

"By the way," called Phil, "on your way to

the library you might drop into my room and go through my suit case once more. When you stole my revolver, you left a few collars — probably by mistake."

"Your weapon? Yes, I took it. Could you expect less?"

"No-o, I couldn't, to be frank, but— Oh, clear out!"

Le Foure walked away, and Elmore strolled over to the window, chuckling at the thought of having ordered his captor out of the room as though he were a servant. Below, he could catch glimpses of the narrow trail — it was nothing more — leading from the house, down the mountain; here and there it skirted the edge of precipices of considerable height, clinging to narrow ledges that wound around rocky cliffs and hanging over ravines where the shadows lay thick. The afternoon sun flashed on something in the distance, and he saw that it was a mountain stream pouring over rocks and fighting its quarrelsome way down into the valley where the herds and flocks would slake their thirst from it, and country swains and sweethearts would stroll along its banks and with awkward eloquence point out to each other its calm beauty, thinking not that so few

miles away it was frothing and flinging itself on the jagged rocks in demoniacal fury. That it was the stream they had crossed on their way to the house he had no doubt; perhaps it was the creek into which the freight train had plunged and blocked the railroad. How strange it seemed to think of railroads in that solitude! And yet he had but to turn his back to the window and he was again in the world that throbbed.

"May we come in?"

He turned and saw the girl standing in the doorway. She was gowned in a simple creation of white, and in her hair a red rose peeped out most bewitchingly. In her arms she held the cat, and she was smiling.

"I have just ordered the boss bandit out of the room, fair lady, but you may enter if you keep your fingers crossed."

"You speak like one of the awful giants of my childhood story-books."

"I am he! As long as your fingers are crossed, I am docile enough to eat out of your hand, but the instant that spell is removed, I find myself roaring out, 'Fe-fi-fo-fum'— and you know the rest."

There was a burst of laughter from the girl

"MAY WE COME IN?"—*Page 104.*

as she dropped into a chair and held the cat out in front of her.

"Mose has enlisted as my bodyguard. Perhaps you haven't met him before, but I'll present you now. Mr. Elmore — Mose!"

"Oh, we've met. But when did he take service with you?"

"Let's see — was it only an hour ago? We're such fast friends that it seems longer. He marched into my room with Madame — but refused to leave with her."

"Wise Mose. But how did you chance to come here, may I ask?" He finished the speech rather confusedly.

"Certainly you may ask. I came to find you, Mr. Elmore."

He felt a sudden leap of his blood, and then quickly turned his eyes from her lest they should speak a forbidden message. Her tone had been very matter-of-fact, and he realized instantly that there was nothing whatever of sentiment in her speech. A smoke ring from his cigar floated upward.

"You don't mind my smoking, do you?" he asked.

"A trifle late in the asking, but I do not in the least mind. I am used to it. My —" She

paused and colored slightly. "I am quite accustomed to it," she added, a little lamely.

"Um-m! Were you about to say your — that the *other* Mr. Elmore smokes?"

"I think it must be a trait that goes with the name, don't you?" she replied, laughing.

Phil laughed, too, and then wondered just why.

"How long are we to remain here?" she asked, growing serious.

"You will find the Query Editor on the floor below. Submit your conundrums to him in writing."

She sprang to her feet, a sudden vexation flashing in her eyes.

"Is that your best reply?" she cried. "I appeal to you, and you flip a joke. Is there nothing to your nature but jest? Not a drop of blood that is red?"

"Don't! Don't ask that question!" he said, rising slowly and resting one hand on the table. "I jest but to keep the ice in my blood when I look at you! I have known you — how long? An eternity? Two days? No matter. The calendar doesn't rule all! You have scarcely learned to speak my name, and I — regret — to speak yours. But no matter. I know — I

know—" The hand on the table was clenched, and his lips drew tight as he paused. "Let me jest, please," he finished. "It is better so."

She stood mute before him, her eyes looking into his for a moment. Then her gaze dropped, and a deeper color stole into her cheeks. Mose had been tumbled to the floor when she sprang to her feet, and now he looked up into her face with an appeal not to be misunderstood. Nor was it. With a quick movement she caught the cat up in her arms, and bending her face low over him, she turned and left the room.

Not a word came from the man's lips. He stood there, his hands clenched, his lips but a straight line, with odd little puckers at the sides of his mouth. Slowly the color faded until his cheeks were pale, but still he stood there, dumb and alone. Suddenly the sound of the piano came to him, bringing a mad, galloping music. Whoever was playing had chosen, consciously or unthinkingly, that which bespoke the storm, the unbridled sweep of winds, the rolling of thunder! It was the mountain torrent in music, foaming, frothing, dashing, plashing, leaping madly from jagged rocks to the glee dance of the whirlpool! And as the soul of the music and the soul of the man blended more

and more in this wild, Viking harmony, his lips grew less tense, the nails no longer dug into his palms. He struck a match, held the flame to his cigar, and dropped back into a chair, smoke hanging over him in a blue film.

"Barbarian!" he muttered.

He repeated the word, and nodded slowly and gravely as he turned it over and over in his mind and sat in judgment on himself. Finally the music ceased. The man listened intently for some moments, his cigar untouched, but no sound came from the piano.

"Madame's soul has been crying," he said. There was a moment of pondering, the cigar once more giving out fragrant haze, and again his head was nodded gravely as if in reply to some argument from an invisible source. "Yes — the soul can cry," he added.

It was a lonesome afternoon. Tiring of the billiard room, Phil descended to the yard, and as he passed the library he glanced in. At the long table Le Foure and Daniel were seated, Le Foure's back being toward the door. He was speaking in a low tone, his head bent over some papers spread on the table before him, and in the eyes of the mountaineer Elmore

caught a flash of something that held his own gaze for a breath. Was it triumph — or what? Hearing the footstep in the hall, the master of the hounds looked up quickly, and without a sign of interest Phil passed on.

The yard was not of itself inviting. The soil of this mountain plateau was not such as to nourish a velvety lawn, but the grass grew luxuriantly in spots, and here and there were rose-bushes bearing flowers of deepest crimson. Lem Johnson was trimming about these bushes, and spraying them with some compound. He looked up as Phil approached.

"Sorry I missed the road to Rogers, Mister," he said, grinning.

"You're not half as sorry as you would have been if I could have read those horn toots," was the reply.

Lem went on with his work, but glanced up frequently to study the build of the man before him.

"Reckon you're right," he finally observed, tersely.

"Still, this isn't such a bad place, after all. So far, I've been treated royally, though I saw Daniel and Le Foure hobnobbing in the library just now, and have no doubt they are discuss-

ing me. A faithful man, that Daniel, I understand."

"Humph!"

Elmore had spoken carelessly and with no especial thought in mind, but at Lem's exclamation he opened his eyes with a sudden understanding.

"Le Foure says Daniel is worth six average mountaineers."

"Mountaineer? Him? Hell!"

The pump sent a shower of liquid into the bushes.

"Mountaineer? Certainly. Look here, Lem, your little bluff will not work with me. The revenue men are bound to land this fellow some day. Remember that, and quit trying to bluff."

Lem dropped the spraying pump and turned quickly.

"The revenuers, you say!" His voice was a hoarse whisper. Then he looked about and glanced up at the windows. "Is *that* why you came to the mountains? Is it? By God, if you want *him*—"

The sentence was not finished. There was a peculiar whirring sound, a woman's scream, and close at hand they saw a girl sitting side-

ways on a mule, the animal snorting with a sudden terror now, its long ears thrust forward in fright. On the girl's arm was a basket. So quietly had they come up the narrow trail that led from the wilderness on the south that their approach had been unobserved until the girl's cry sounded.

"Quick, Lem, it's a rattler!" she called.

With a bound, Johnson plunged through the rose-bushes, unheeding the thorns that caught at his hands and splotched his flesh with blood.

"Back the mule, Nell! Now don't be scared!"

Phil saw him thrust one hand into his bosom and jerk out a revolver. Elmore had followed the impetuous mountaineer, but had taken the time and precaution to run around the rose-bushes instead of through them, and as he reached the edge of the yard, he saw Lem drop to one knee. On a rock twenty paces away, close beside the trail, was a coil of muddy yellow with a flat, ugly head raised a few inches above the coils, a death warning sounding in the dry, rattling whir at the other end of the coil. The mule was terror-stricken, and its plunging threatened to throw its rider within reach of the serpent's spring.

Only an instant was the man's knee on the ground, his heavy pistol clutched in both hands, one elbow resting on his knee. Then flame spat from the weapon's muzzle, and before the smoke of it had lifted, another shot rang out. But the second shot was needless. After the first, the snake was thrashing about convulsively and headless.

"Bully for you, Lem!" cried Phil, clapping his hands in admiration.

But Lem gave no heed. He had run forward and kicked the headless, squirming thing into a hollow, and then had clutched the mule by the bridle and quieted it.

"Don't be scared, Nell," he repeated, thrusting the pistol back into his shirt. "Nothin' ain't goin' to hurt you now, little girl!"

"Why — of course there ain't, Lem. You're some handy with that gun, ain't you?"

"Shucks! I couldn't miss that big mark!"

"Yes, you could, too. Think I don't know it takes a peart eye to knock a rattler's head?"

The man looked up into her face, and then dropped his eyes, and with his heavy boot he kicked a rock out of the side of the trail.

"Reckon my eye didn't have nothin' to do

with it, Nell. Reckon my heart aimed the gun."

The girl blushed, and then, glancing up, appeared to notice for the first time that Phil was not far away. Instinctively she adjusted her skirts and sat more erectly.

"I've brought the butter," she said, ignoring Lem's words. "Where's Dan?"

With a quick motion the young man threw up his head, and Phil saw a dark look flash across his face. His hand fell from the mule's bridle and was clenched spasmodically.

"In the house. Maybe you ort to have called him instead of me to kill the rattler!"

The words were tense with a jealous passion that could not escape the third party, who now joined the two.

"Lem, that was the best shot I ever saw," Phil said, laying his hand on the other's shoulder.

"Reckon I'd better ride on to the house," said the girl, glancing curiously at the stranger.

She could not have been more than eighteen, slender in form, with an abundance of reddish-brown hair, and with a complexion that even the constant exposure to sun and wind could not make unpleasing. The fingers that

held the bridle rein were small and tapering, but bore evidences of rough toil.

"I'll stay here and bury the dead," said Phil, and with a stout stick he began gouging the dirt and stones loose, and tumbling them down into the little hollow where the rattler had ceased to writhe.

"Here's my gun. Better keep a sharp eye, for where there's one rattler there's generally two."

Lem thrust the weapon into Phil's hands and walked on up the trail beside the girl. In the yard Le Foure and Daniel now awaited them, the sound of the shots having called them from the house. The girl handed her basket of butter to Lem and then reached out her hands to Daniel, and he lifted her to the ground. Phil slipped the revolver into his pocket and followed back up to the house.

At sunset Nell rode away down the trail, and by her side walked Daniel. Phil had come out of the house, and stood on the veranda watching the two. The man's hand rested on the mule's neck, and the girl's head was drooped to hear what he was saying to her. It was a suggestive picture. Suddenly something moved beside a fallen tree just across the ravine and

close to where the trail wound its rough way. Phil watched closely, and was amazed to see a man rise to a crouching posture and then dart quickly from tree to tree. Elmore ran to the rose-bushes that bordered the yard, and gained a better view. The man across the ravine had disappeared, but a moment later he was seen crawling out on to a ledge of rocks, where he lay flat and still for some moments, evidently peering at something below. Then he slowly worked back from his position, rose to his feet, and ran back toward the house. It was Lem.

Circling around the bushes, Phil hastened down the trail, meeting Lem close to the spot where the rattler had been killed. There was a blaze in the eyes of the mountaineer.

"I let you have my gun. Give it to me, quick!" he said hoarsely.

Phil's hand moved toward his pocket, but the look in the other's eyes was too eloquent. The return of the weapon then would be followed by murder.

"I left the gun lying by the rose-bushes. It was too heavy to carry. Let's walk back there."

Johnson broke into a run toward the house.

"I'm in a hurry," he called. "Reckon I can find it, though."

Phil followed at a leisurely walk, and long before he reached the bushes he saw the other bending over, searching the ground closely.

"There ain't no gun here! Where is it?"

"Why do you want it so badly?"

Lem turned fiercely to Elmore.

"That's none o' your business! I want it! Yes, I'll tell you. There's another damned snake down yonder I'm goin' to kill! Give me my gun!"

"Look here, Lem, have you stopped to think what a break you made in giving your pistol to me — a prisoner?"

The mountaineer looked him full in the face for a few breaths.

"No, I didn't think," he answered. "I forgot it all — somehow. But I'm claimin' that gun now. You said it was here, and, by God, you lied!"

"Yes, I lied. I lied because I saw you across the ravine — because I saw your eyes when you asked for the gun."

"I want it," was the sullen reply.

"And you shall have it if you'll agree not

to go after that rattler you want to kill. Promise, or you'll not get it, unless you are a better man than I."

The other said nothing for a time. He seemed to be making a mental calculation of the results of a rough-and-tumble fight with the man who confronted him.

"All right," he said, at last. "I reckon I might best you, but it would be too late then. I'll promise."

The revolver was handed to him, and he quickly slipped fresh cartridges into the empty chambers. He looked down the trail an instant, hesitated, and then slipped the weapon into his bosom.

"Where does she live, Lem?"

Another period of hesitation, a dull red showing through the tan of his cheeks.

"Just over the mountain a ways," he replied, slowly. "Her mother's a widow."

"Did she ever care for you?"

"We was promised — and then — that damned rattler come to these mountains!"

"And now — "

"This ain't none o' your business, Mister! You'd better go in the house where you belong!"

He turned and walked away into the gathering gloom.

Glancing at his watch, Phil saw that it was nearing time for dinner. He went to his room and dressed with as much care as his limited wardrobe would permit of. When he left Chicago it was on a business mission, with no thought of social demands, and the contents of his suit case reflected this fact. And to think that here in the Ozark wilderness he was primping his best in preparation for an evening dinner! He whistled gayly as he carefully adjusted his tie and critically surveyed his cuffs to see that they were immaculate.

The heavy-beamed ceilings and dull-panelled walls of the dining room gave further evidence of the builder's quiet tastes and his penchant for the antique in design. Mammoth brass lamps similar to the one in the hall were suspended by brass chains and gave a sparkle to the silver and cut glass of the table service. Le Foure was in evening dress, and Madame was beautiful in a creation of creamy silk, with a cluster of the crimson roses in her corsage. From her dainty ears diamonds flashed. In striking contrast, Mrs. Elmore came down to dinner in a gown of black, cut low enough to

reveal a snowy throat and bit of shoulder. A long necklace of pearls encircled her throat and relieved the simplicity of her gown. She wore no flowers, but in her cheeks nature's rarest roses were blooming.

"You are gloriously beautiful this evening," said Phil, audaciously, as they met.

"In borrowed plumage," she replied, smiling. "Luckily, the bandit's wife is neither fat nor without taste."

The silent Japanese served with skill, and the dinner progressed much as it would have had the elevated railways been but a few blocks distant, or the automobiles honking hoarsely past the doorway.

Le Foure adroitly led the conversation into political channels, and to Elmore's surprise Madame entered into the discussion eagerly and with a remarkable grasp of policies. It was a subject in which he was only passingly interested, but he argued with Le Foure on finance and tariff, and even managed to work up a bit of enthusiasm in a wrangle over the capital and labor question, but when Le Foure — or was it Madame? — crossed the sea and began poking around the old-world monarchies and quizzing him as to his ideas concerning

this or that royal family skeleton, he bluntly avowed his perfect ignorance.

"And the shame of it is that I haven't any desire to overcome my ignorance," he added.

Had he been watching closely he might have seen a swift glance flash from Madame to Le Foure, but he wasn't. He was paying close attention to the young woman beside him, and relating to her bits of the mountain romance that had been revealed during the afternoon.

"If faithful Daniel fails to answer to some roll-call it will not require a Sherlock Holmes to solve the mystery," he said.

"Love must be a very tragic thing in the mountains."

"Yes, very tragic — in the mountains."

"Now, in the cities love is flowers, automobiling, the theatre — and bonbons."

"And in the Ozarks it is mountain roses and pinks, the poetry of the hills and the mountain torrents, quiet heroism, — and six-shooters."

"I beg pardon, Monsieur. You did not hear me. I was asking if you believed Russia was justified in attempting to dominate King Alexander and thus get a grasp on that unhappy country?"

"Um-m! What country?"

"What country, Monsieur? Surely, you must know I refer to Servia!"

"Servia? Servia? Oh, yes,—that's some place near those pesky Balkan Mountains, isn't it?"

"Monsieur jests again."

Phil glanced at the girl beside him, and in her eyes he saw a twinkle as he replied:

"Seems as if I can't get my humor too subtle for you, try as I may. I confess to jesting. Unhappy Servia! By the way, what's the reason for the unhappiness?"

"The reason? Misrule! Immorality in high places! Alexander is not entitled to the throne. But hearken to my words, Monsieur. He and Draga will not much longer debauch the kingdom and sneer at justice!"

He struck the table with his clenched fist and half arose from his chair as he spoke.

"Well, I'm not caring who holds the job, Alexander—or—or—faithful Daniel." Turning to the girl, he whispered: "Can't you start a discussion of styles with Madame? Anything to keep the argument in America."

"The lady appears as deeply interested in Alexander and Draga as her husband."

Le Foure ordered wine, and Madame arose,

saying that she and Mrs. Elmore would seek the music room. Phil also arose.

"It may not be polite, but I prefer music to wine, myself, and I'll ask to be permitted to withdraw, also."

Without waiting for a reply from Le Foure, he stepped to the girl's side and walked from the room with her.

"Coming back to the original question," he said calmly, "I prefer the six-shooter brand rather than the bonbon variety."

"You have just shown that you are somewhat careless of civilized customs. You are rather an oddity, Mr. Elmore, if I may be pardoned for saying it."

He looked down into her face and saw the witchery of her smile.

"You are pardoned. A woman's smile is her sesame to the realm of privileges. Perhaps I am odd. But Le Foure is kinder. He calls me a joker when he cannot follow my inanities."

Madame seated herself at the piano, and if the mountains and the wilderness had been forgotten before, they were driven still farther from memory by the deft play of her fingers. Le Foure lingered long in the dining room, and when he joined them, the flush in his cheeks

told its own story. His wife frowned slightly, and Phil imagined her lip curled in disdain, but it was only fleeting. Then she turned to her music again.

"May I petition for the selection you played this afternoon — the one that hints at a soul storm?"

She shook her head.

"I was not at the piano this afternoon, though I heard the music and delighted in it. A 'soul storm'? Yes, you name it well."

Phil turned to the girl and saw a heightened color in her cheeks.

"Yes, it was I," she confessed. "I was playing — to Mose."

The clock in the corner struck nine, and the girl arose and announced her intention of seeking her room.

"The moon is coming up. I think I shall smoke a cigar on the veranda," said Phil, bowing to her.

"And I shall join you with my cigarette," said Mádame. "Yes, I smoke them — on moonlight nights."

Le Foure also lighted a cigar, and the three sat on the veranda. The sky-line was below them, and the moon seemed coming up at their

feet, but in the west, clouds were banking blackly and the wind was already beginning to sigh in a weird way among the oaks and pines. The subject of politics was avoided, and the conversation jumped idly from one topic to another. Le Foure was heavy with wine and seemed content to sit silent and puff great clouds of smoke, but Madame, sitting where the light from the window fell on her, gave free rein to her vivacious wit, daintily blowing rings of scented smoke from her cigarette. Her eyes were brilliants, her voice a caress, and Mr. Philip Elmore admitted to himself that her presence was a delight. Indeed, he found himself quite ignoring Le Foure, who now was nodding in his chair and streaking his clothes with ashes.

"Ah, it is really grand, our mountain life, Monsieur," said the woman, softly. "Perhaps you will learn to — be glad that you were — that you came. Yes, I — hope so."

There was just a hint of a droop to her head, and the man found his eyes devouring her. In an instant he remembered, though, and, straightening up, he looked across at the moon, which now had come up to a level from the horizon below them. Madame was undeniably beautiful, but — Le Foure yawned sleepily.

"Good night," said Phil, abruptly, tossing his cigar away. "I'm going to bed."

As he entered his room he hesitated, and then turned and glanced across the hall. A faint line of light showed under the doorway. He closed his door and went to the window.

"She was playing to Mose!" he murmured, and a faint smile came to his lips.

How long he slept he did not know, but it must have been near midnight when he suddenly became wide awake, every sense on the alert instantly. Why, he did not know. The storm was now sweeping its advance guards of lightning and wind across the mountains, and perhaps it was a crash of thunder or the shriek of the tempest that had brought him to his senses with every nerve at its highest tension, as much so as though he had been for an hour awaiting that moment. But not a muscle moved, and his heavy breathing scarcely paused. No sound had come from out of the darkness of his room, but that mysterious sixth sense, sometimes given to man, told him that something unusual was transpiring very near to him. Deeply and heavily he breathed, as though slumber was still sealing his eyes.

There came a fiery blaze from the heavens,

and his heart thumped itself to his very teeth, it seemed, for by its light he saw his door standing open, and just vanishing through the doorway was a form. Then his pulse calmed somewhat, for even in that brief glance he knew the slender figure to be that of a woman.

CHAPTER VII

A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY

A COLD perspiration seemed to spring from every pore of his body. His pulse had quieted slightly as he realized that it was not a murderous mountaineer who had crept into his room in the night—but it was but little less cheering to contemplate being murdered by a woman.

That it was Madame Le Foure his reason instantly told him, and that those soft hands were capable of clutching a dagger his imagination as quickly assured him. Once or twice he had detected her gaze upon him in a way that now seemed to him to have been very peculiar. Was she even then calculating the force of the blow necessary to drive a blade to a vital spot? But why not Le Foure himself? Well, there had been other Lady Macbeths! And Madame was the energy and daring of the Le Foure family; of that he had no doubt.

But she was leaving the chamber when the

lightning had revealed her. Why? Another flood of perspiration. Were other assassins near at hand? And was his respite but fleeting? Perhaps even now the deadly blade was at the throat of the girl across the hall! He flung the bed-covers from him, and came to his feet on the floor. She should not die there alone without his having battled for her! And when the breath left his body, the murderers should find that that over which they gloated had cost them a price!

Dear God! Was that her cry now? He gathered his muscles for a dash — but no, it was only the piping of the wind at some window. Out there — in the hallway and the rooms — was silence, a damnable silence, it seemed to the man who paused in the darkness, his hands tightly clenched, his jaws hard-set. These thoughts had raced through his mind like the play of the lightning, and not more than half a minute had elapsed since he saw that form in the doorway until he stood beside the bed, nerved for a struggle.

Click!

His heart pounded furiously once more, and he half crouched for — he knew not what. For an instant he ceased to breathe lest the pump-

ing of his lungs deafen his ears to those other sounds, those faint, ghostly sounds on which his life and her life — the girl across the hall — hinged. Not a sound came. He drew a long breath. He knew now. That faint click had been the latch of his door as an unseen hand closed it. Why had it been closed? And was the prowler — the assassin — on this side or the other side of the door? But, pshaw! Was he crouching there in fear of a woman? He, the athlete? It was childish — only he wished that unseen being would do something — anything — to relieve the tension. Another moment went by, and no sound. If only it would lighten again.

He crept cautiously toward the door, one arm outstretched to encounter whoever might be there. At last the door was reached, and he found that it was closed and latched. Evidently the prowler had left. Carefully he turned the knob and drew the door open inch by inch, his body braced for the shock should some one hurl himself upon him. Then he peered out into the darkness of the hall, where there was perfect silence, save the moan of the wind and the growl of thunder. But another glare of lightning flashed in at

the windows, and in the instant that it tarried he saw what his eyes were searching for.

At the head of the stairs stood a woman.

She was clad in some dark, loose-appearing garment. Her back was to him, and she stood with head bent toward Le Foure's sleeping room, in a listening attitude. Again silence. But soon, as he crouched there in his doorway, he heard a faint sound as of a misstep, and he knew that she was descending the stairs. Without hesitation, he stole down the hallway toward the stairs, where he paused. And now he understood her listening attitude, for from Le Foure's room came the sound of heavy breathing, bordering closely on to snores. The wine had bestialized the master of the house, and he need not be taken into reckoning before the sun rose.

But what meant this woman's strange actions? Phil began to suspect, and his suspicions swept away the fear of murder that had so lately been upon him. Clearly, he dared not yet follow down the stairs, so he stretched himself at full length on the floor, but so that he could peer around the top post, and thus command a very fair view of the hallway below. The woman was at the bottom of the stairs, he knew, for now

she became less cautious, and her footsteps, though faint, were plainly audible to the watcher above.

Straight to the front door she walked, and Phil smiled. Nor did the smile leave his lips, nor surprise come to him when she unlocked the door and a man stepped into the hall from the darkness without, but the softly spoken words of the man did cause him to start in surprise.

"*Sainte Vierge, que le temps est mauvais cette nuit!*"

Phil knew even in that whisper that it was Daniel, and this was as he had expected, but that he should speak in French was what amazed. From the moment that he had seen Daniel looking up toward Madame's window so eagerly that afternoon, and had noted the melancholy droop of Le Foure's eyes when he had said that it was a way with women to love the strong, Phil had suspected the mountaineer and the woman, but that he should come to his amours with glib French upon his tongue was totally unexpected, and indicated intrigue unsuspicioned.

"Yes, my loyal one, the storm is violent."

Once more Philip Elmore congratulated himself that French had been a favorite study in the

days when he had felt a spasmodic ambition to enter the consular service.

"Come," she said. "In the dining room we may talk."

They moved cautiously along the hallway, and then a pajama-clad figure came stealing down the stairs and halted at the lower step. There was silence and darkness all about him. But only for a moment. A tiny flame sprang up in the dining room and quickly gave way to a faint but steady light. Phil crept toward it and knelt behind a screen of palms close to the wide doorway. Madame was lowering the window-shades, and Daniel was just placing a lighted candle on the table.

"There are no prying eyes on the mountain, but it is better thus," said the woman, turning from the shaded windows.

"But that door?" Daniel nodded toward the opening, close to which Phil was kneeling.

"No, I dare not try to slide those doors. They are very noisy. It is well enough as it is."

"True. I sometimes forget that we are no longer in Paris."

"Paris! Ah-h!" Even in the candle's faint glow Phil could see the light leap to her eyes as she caressed the word. "No — these moun-

tains — bah! But the end of the world is not yet, my own, and perhaps — !"

A shrug of the pretty shoulders and a slight gesture of her hands were more eloquent than any words, and the man before her smiled. He wore a close-fitting corduroy jacket, corduroy knickerbockers with leggings reaching from shoe to knee. A corduroy cap lay on the table beside him. As seen in the candlelight, he was a handsome fellow.

"Jean — does he sleep soundly in this storm?"

"Yes, after he drinks heavily, all the thunders of heaven could not arouse him."

"And that other — this Elmore?"

She laughed softly.

"Never fear. He is dreaming. He did not drink, but such as he care nothing for the sport of storms."

Daniel had seated himself, and now he suddenly leaned toward her, and for a moment he looked full into her piquant face. Then he slowly settled back.

"Indeed?" There was the faintest sneer in the word.

She smiled again and shook her head.

"No, he sleeps too calmly. Should he

awaken, it will be but to sigh and fall asleep again."

"Was Hartley correct regarding him, or is it all a mistake, as I suspect?"

"It was a blunder, I believe. He has nothing in his pockets to show that Hartley has not blundered."

"His pockets? How know you?"

"Very simple. After he slept I entered his room — hush! No exclamations! Perhaps it was a bit daring, the entrance, but Monsieur kindly failed to awaken, and then — a few drops of chloroform on my handkerchief held above his face — you know the trick — and he slumbered more soundly."

"If he had awakened —"

Another shrug of her shoulders.

"Why discuss that? He did not. In my own room I looked over his letters very carefully. Then I returned them. Pooh! It was child's play. He will not awaken until the chloroform wears away. And so small an amount leaves no signs — as you know."

"By my heart, you are a treasure, Nanita!"

"It is enough if you think so. I dared — yes. Why? Your love — and the stake we play for. I am willing to dare for this — for

"FOR YOU — YES, MY NANITA, FOR YOU!" — *Page 135.*

you have made such unbelievable sacrifices for me."

"For you — yes, my Nanita, for you!" He knelt at her side, pressed her hand in both of his, and kissed it passionately. "But soon all will be ours, and then — ah, *then*, my soul's own!"

Crouching behind the palms, Phil found his thoughts lost in a maze of bewilderment. The woman suffered Daniel to kneel there, her hand pressed in his, and a smile was on her lips. Madame had such a peculiar way of smiling! With her, smiles were almost speech, so plainly were her emotions written on her lips. But her face was much in the shadow now, and the watcher could not plainly see the curve of her lips, though he would have sworn that there was more of triumph than of love in her face.

Coming to his feet, Daniel suddenly clasped her in his arms, and despite the fact that she struggled fiercely, he crushed her in a passionate embrace, and his lips were close to hers when she broke from his arms and sprang back.

"No, no — not that! Not that — yet!" she panted.

"And why not now? Do I not deserve your lips, my queen? Think you it is nothing that I have —"

"Sh-h-h!" She threw up one hand appealingly, and took a step toward the doorway. "Your voice is becoming too loud. Be patient, my brave; if my lips can give you happiness, they will not be denied you — much longer. I am a strange woman, but you have been a conqueror of yourself this long, be so but a little longer. And then —! Ah-h!"

She dropped her head slightly, with a fetching little sigh that would have put hot blood into a snow man. Daniel had stood a few paces from her, scowling at her repulse of him, but at her coy promise, so alluringly dangled before him, the scowl vanished, and he leaned forward once more and took her hand.

"Very well, Nanita, I will conquer — myself. But we must delay no longer. The fruit is fast ripening. Soon it will fall from the tree — and we must be there when it falls, else we may be too late to claim it."

"Yes, yes; within the week we shall be on our way."

"A week, Nanita? It would be better tonight. I have the horses saddled and waiting. In half an hour we can secure everything and be away. You have —"

"No, I have not. We must wait, I tell you.

I watched him closely, but I could not get it. He does not wholly trust me — even though he is mad for love of me."

"Then a dagger — "

She clutched at him, as though to stay a hand already uplifted to strike.

"Not *that!*" she gasped, and shuddered. "There must be no dagger!"

"Well, what then? Every day is precious now, and that wine-guzzling weakling alone blocks our way."

His tone had grown harsh and cold as he half turned toward the stairway, as if to disregard her words and strike the blow that would remove the sleeping Le Foure from the situation. Evidently Madame feared this, for she stepped quickly between him and the doorway.

"It shall not be the dagger, I tell you!" she responded, her eyes on his.

But an ugly mood was on the man, and the sullen scowl came again to his face.

"I am not so sure of that. If I choose to strike the blow, I have but to choose."

"No — there shall be no dagger, I warn you! If you start toward the stairway, I will cry out!"

He laughed.

"And bring the game to me to be cared for, instead of forcing me to go to his lair."

"You forget Elmore!" she exclaimed.

He turned fiercely, and his hands gripped the table.

"Damn Elmore! Why do you thrust him into my face?"

"You forced it."

For a moment they stood looking into each other's face, each trying to read the other. The man yielded.

"Nanita," he said, his voice softening, "why should we quarrel? There shall be no dagger. It was my love made me savage."

"You must go now," she answered.

"And — you will — "

"I will do my best, and will give you the signal when I have succeeded."

"And then —?" He paused, his face close to hers.

"Yes — then," she said simply.

Phil knew that the conference was about to end, and that if he was to avoid detection, he must act quickly, and gain the stairway before they left the dining room, else a flash of lightning might betray him. The storm had grown less fierce now that the rain was beating down,

but still the lightning gleamed at intervals and the thunder rolled across the hills.

"You know you have but to command," said Daniel, humbly.

Phil heard her murmur something in reply as he stole back to the hallway, and, pausing a moment at the foot of the stairs, he saw the candle move toward the hall, and then it was extinguished. Now they were in the hall, moving cautiously toward the door. Elmore retreated up the stairs. In the darkness below, one of the plotters brushed against a chair, making a slight noise. Then they went on toward the door. The end of the night's drama had come. Phil tiptoed back up the stairs, intending to seek his room and slumber, leaving the perplexities of it all for another day.

As he reached the top of the stairs, a puff of wind struck his cheek, and he paused an instant, puzzled. Whence came that breeze? Pshaw! Some window had been left up, doubtless, — but it was strange he had not felt the draught when he left his room a short time before on this queer adventure! Could Le Foure have aroused from his drunken sleep and raised a window? He stole across toward Le Foure's room, and paused close to his door

to listen. No, the fellow was still sleeping, and his heavy breathing was audible. The breeze puffed in again, and the smell of rain came with it. Evidently the open window was close at hand. Well, if they wanted to be careless and let the rain dash in and ruin things, little cared he. He was not a guest, but a prisoner.

He turned toward his own room, but almost as he did so a flash of fire came from among the flowers in the conservatory and the report of a revolver sounded with a crash in the close quarters.

Something hot seemed to have fallen on Phil's left shoulder, and as the sting of it flashed along his nerves he found himself staggering, and for an instant he was on his knees. But in a trice he was up and plunging recklessly in among the palms and the fragrant flowers from which the shot had come. A sweep of wind fanned his face and was welcome, for he was still considerably dazed. An open window was directly before him, and he sprang to it just in time to hear something fall heavily to the ground. The would-be assassin had escaped.

A babel of cries were now sounding through the house, Madame's scream ringing loud as

she came flying up the stairs and paused, appalled at the darkness and uncertainty as to what terror was crouching there. Phil turned from the window and she heard his step. Another cry, and she fled to her own room as the voice of Le Foure sounded from the library:

"Who's there?"

The tone was quavering, and it was evident that he was unnerved. From the floor above came the confused voices of the servants as they huddled close to the stairs, afraid to strike a light or venture farther.

"It is I — Elmore," responded Phil.

Crack! Flame spat from the darkness of the library, and a bullet smashed a jardinière near the man in the conservatory.

Crack! Another spurt of fire, and the bullet chugged into the window casing close beside him.

"For God's sake, stop shooting!" yelled Phil, dropping to his knees.

"You have tried to kill me, you dog!" came the shrill reply, and another jardinière was smashed by a bullet.

"No, you idiot! I've been shot, myself! Strike a light!"

A low laugh came from the library.

"And make a target of myself? Strike your own light!"

"All right, as soon as I can reach my room."

He ran to his room, found a match and lighted a lamp, after which he slipped on his trousers and went out into the hall.

"Mr. Elmore!" A trembling voice came from the room opposite. "Are you wounded? And, oh, what does it all mean?"

"Just a scratch, I think, Mrs. Elmore. I don't know what it means, but it's all over. The fellow went out through a window."

He hastened to the library, and crouching there he found Le Foure, a pistol in either hand. In the doorway to his sleeping room stood Madame, her face deathly pale, one hand against the door as though for support. She gave no heed to the half-dressed, crouching figure with the pistols, but her eyes burned into those of the man who bore the lamp, and whose garments were stained with blood.

"Put up your guns and look at my shoulder; it hurts."

As he spoke, Phil set the lamp on the table and dropped into a chair, his own face almost as

white as that of the woman who kept her questioning gaze on him.

"I don't understand," said Le Foure, coming forward, but still clutching the pistols as he peered out into the hallway.

"Neither do I," responded the wounded man. "But the fellow who pinked me has gone — went out a window, probably the way he came."

Le Foure stepped to the door and called to the chattering servants, and soon lights were flashing in the hallways. He surveyed the hall and the conservatory.

"Yes, he is gone," he said, and laid his pistols on the table beside the lamp. "Now your hurt. I will summon Daniel. He is very good with hurts."

"No, no, no!" Madame stepped forward. "I will see to his wound. No need to summon Daniel, I am sure."

"And let me assist."

Phil looked up to see Mrs. Elmore in the doorway.

"Thank you," he answered. "I believe I would rather trust Chicago than the very faithful Daniel."

He did not look at Madame as he spoke, but

he knew that her eyes were on him with a feverish stare. Quickly the shirt was cut away and the blood sponged from the wound, when it was found that the bullet simply had ploughed a jagged furrow across the shoulder, drawing much blood and leaving a wound that would be painful and sore for a few days, but nothing more.

"I heard the fellow at my door," explained Phil, glibly, in response to Le Foure's questions. "And as I jumped out of bed he fired at me."

"But you were in the conservatory when I fired."

"Yes — I was foolish, and chased him until he dodged in among the flowers and got out of the window."

Le Foure left the ladies binding up Phil's hurt and went out into the hallway. When he returned, he looked at that young man suspiciously.

"I have been to your room, and I cannot find a bullet mark."

There was an inarticulate sound in Madame's throat, and the hand that held the bandage trembled. Phil shot a glance to her.

"My window was up. Probably the bullet went out that way."

"No—your window was down, Monsieur. I noticed."

The man was eying him closely, and Phil knew that his mind was full of suspicion.

"Yes, I know it is down now," he replied, calling all of his wit to his rescue. "I lowered it when I lighted the lamp, else the wind would have blown out the match."

"It is all very strange," muttered Le Foure.

"Yes, seems that you have porch climbers here just as we do in Chicago."

"But why should you be attacked?"

"Another conundrum for the Query Editor," replied Phil.

Then he looked up into the eyes of the girl in gray, and what he saw there caused him to forget the pain of his wound, and brought pleasing dreams to him when he was again in bed.

CHAPTER VIII

"THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' GREATER"

LURED by the beautifully colored illustrations of the railroad pamphlets, and the glowing descriptions concerning the abundance of game to be found amid the Ozark wilderness, and the game fish that crowded its mountain streams, an occasional Nimrod or fisherman would penetrate the region in which the foregoing incidents transpired, but usually the stranger's sojourn was brief.

Of solitude there was an abundance, and all that was needed to rebuild a debilitated and nerve-wrecked human being was to be had there for the breathing, but the game and fish were mostly to be found in those enticing pictures showing campers with deer hung in profusion from forks of convenient trees, or mammoth strings of fish suspended from poles resting on the shoulders of the smiling fishermen. True, a deer occasionally was seen in the region, and bass were not total strangers to the streams, but the mountain folk, few and

scattered as they were, had a way of making sportsmen feel as though their coming had crowded the community just a trifle more than was comfortable or desirable.

Of these mountain dwellers none was more successful in diffusing the community's desire to be exclusive in the matter of friendliness than "Mother" Belden. She had had another name once — but that was long ago; besides, what mattered it? There were those in the neighborhood — which, interpreted, meant a radius of some eight or ten miles — who had been intimately acquainted with her husband, Zeb Belden, and some there were who had crouched close beside Zeb on that hot afternoon when Winchesters spurted jets of flame from behind rocks and trees after the dolorous notes of a hunting-horn had summoned the mountaineers to dispute the advance of a small body of strange men who persisted in examining secluded nooks and caverns.

And when the fight was over, and the one or two strangers left alive were fugitives in the mountains, making their way as best they could back to the world of the railroad and the telegraph, "Mother" Belden was a widow. She had stood in front of their cabin home, with

little Nellie clinging voiceless to her skirts, during all of that long hour when the rifles were cracking just across the ravine and sending sickening echoes through the gulches and among the timber, and when the last spiteful crack of a rifle had sent its echo dancing and leaping from cliff to cliff and the death-like silence had come, she stood there shading her eyes with one hand, the other hand clenched, and her jaws hard-set, watching the trail.

At last the men had appeared, trudging slowly toward the little cabin that clung to the side of the mountain, and she knew her child was fatherless. At that moment, but never afterward, was there one sob in her throat, a dry, husky, gasping moan. With the girl still clinging to her skirts she led the way into the cabin and pointed to the bed, where the men laid the bloody form. But few words were spoken, for none were needed. She knew the story as well as they. But as the smoke-begrimed men stepped back from the bed she dropped to her knees, kissed the dead lips once, and, drawing little Nellie closer, she soothed her and stilled her cries. As she did so she took the child's hand, muttered some words, and dabbled the little palm in the

heart's blood of the father, and then pressed it firmly and evenly against the whitewashed wall. A moment later the bloody print of her own hand was beside Nellie's.

And in the ten years that had elapsed since that day Mother Belden knelt often before those imprints and muttered a few words. The gray had crept rapidly into the woman's brown hair, and the blue eyes had dimmed greatly, but sometimes, when the hunting-horns crooned their crescendo notes in the hills, her eyes were no longer faded, but in them a strange fire flashed, and the lines about her mouth deepened as she harked. Nellie did not kneel before the imprints on the wall, but often she stood looking at them while strange emotions battled in her young heart, and then she would slip out of the house and walk slowly to the mound but a stone's throw distant, where the first flowers of the springtime and the last of the chilling fall were always strewn, and there she would sit with one hand on the grave, looking away across the valley, beyond the blue haze that hung over the distant ridges, until a call from her mother would remind her that there were cows to milk, or butter to churn, or eggs to gather.

After that tragedy in which Zeb Belden lost his life there was great activity for a few days among the men of the mountains, and many strange-looking articles were hastily torn from cabins and hidden where no human eyes could discover them, after which most of the men had made a pilgrimage to other parts and remained there until, by some mysterious means, they learned that the revenue officers had made the expected return with strong reënforcements and had searched the mountains to no purpose. It was many months before the last pilgrim returned to the hills he had called home, and some of them found burned cabins awaiting them. But as time rolled on, new cabins appeared above the ashes of the old; queer-looking kettles and tanks and pipe-coils were brought forth from mysterious places, and in far-away Washington secret service men sat in luxuriously appointed offices and gravely declared that the government was being robbed and cheated, for in certain districts of the Ozarks a white whiskey was being sold that had never made a close acquaintance with revenue stamps.

Mother Belden had never looked with favor on the Le Foures as neighbors. Her cabin was, as Lem had said, "just over the mountain a

ways" from the Castle, and the mere fact that "just over the mountain" meant a matter of some two miles did not prevent Mrs. Belden from regarding them as her neighbors. True, the etiquette of the mountains did not demand much in the way of social amenities, but there was something mysterious about the Le Foures, and "Mother" knew that the government moved in mysterious ways its injustices to perform. A diplomat would have described the situation by saying that the Le Foures were *persona non grata;* Mother Belden summed it up by saying that "they'd bear watchin'."

"Reckon that slim little devil will find somethin' 'sides mockin'-birds singin' close to his ears if I catch him snoopin'," she said.

Then she walked into her little bedroom, and when Nellie peeped in she saw her mother kneeling before a faded bit of red on the wall.

But the Le Foures paid good money for butter and eggs, and so Nellie and her mule, Joker, made regular trips to the mansion, but Mother Belden never favored them with a call, and Le Foure, after one or two visits to the cabin, remained on his own side of the mountain.

"Kept his eyes a-workin' all the time he was around," said Mother to Nell after one

of these visits a few weeks prior to the capture of Phil and his companion. "Don't like that Daniel, nuther," she added.

The girl made no answer, but a deeper color was in her cheeks when she went out to her favorite spot under a tree and stretched herself out on the grass, her elbows on the ground, and her chin on her hands. Down below she could see the trail that led away from her cabin home, across the mountain and up to the plateau beyond where the "big house" stood. Often her mule had picked its way along that trail in the old days when the rich man with a sick daughter lived in the mansion, and always the way had seemed rough and the journey wearisome, but now — How handsome Daniel was! She had been received by him on her first call at Le Foure's, and once or twice he had walked beside Joker for a short distance on her return.

How different he was from the mountaineers she had known! He was a mountaineer, yes; he said so, himself — but from a different section. And how beautifully he talked! He must be a poet. She knew that out there in that strange world whence the revenue men had come with death and destruction there were

men who could say things just like music, and they were called poets. And though Daniel used the language of her mountains, which she knew was not always "just 'cordin' to books," he said things with music in them.

Down yonder, where the trail turned, a wild rose-bush was growing. Her eyes rested on the spot, and then, suddenly, she dropped her arms to the ground and hid her face in them, while her heart throbbed in response to a tiny, delicious thrill. It was at that rose-bush, the evening before, that Daniel had kissed her!

"Ain't cryin', are you, Nell?"

She raised her head quickly, and a slight gasp came from her throat as she saw Lem Johnson standing before her, regarding her a little anxiously.

"Shucks, no, Lem! I was just — just thinkin'!" She dropped her eyes.

"What do you think about when you hide your face like that?"

She twisted around and sat with her back to the tree.

"You don't know nothin' about girls, Lem."

"Reckon you're right, I don't," he replied. "Don't you want to take a little walk down the trail, Nell?"

She hesitated a moment, and then sprang lightly to her feet.

"All right. I ain't got nothin' else to do."

"Where is Mother?"

The girl nodded toward the house.

"In there — kneelin'," she replied softly.

They walked slowly along the mountain slope, the sturdy young fellow appearing brawnier still beside the slender girl who walked with him, her head slightly drooped.

"Saw Crazy Jerry last night," he said.

"Yes?"

"The spell's comin' on him again. He come up to my house an' asked me if I'd seen Rosalie."

"Did he?"

"Yes. He's been over in the Valley workin', but the spell's comin' on him, so he's come back. Poor devil!"

She raised her head, but did not speak. A hawk was circling about high over the hill-tops, and the tinkle of a cow-bell sounded near them. He glanced sharply at her.

"Are you sure there ain't nothin' the matter, little girl?" he asked.

Then her gaze came back from that hazy realm, and a half-startled look was in her eyes.

"No, no, Lem. La, me, you're foolish!"

The color deepened in her cheeks again, for they were passing the cluster of rose-bushes at the turn of the trail. Right here was the very spot where Daniel had kissed her and said that she was a living rose! Suddenly she was swept off her feet and was crushed close in Lem's embrace, while his lips were pressing hotly against her own.

"Foolish?" he exclaimed, holding her there despite her struggles. "I'm foolisher over you, Nell, than Jerry is over Rosalie!"

He laughed, and tried to kiss her again, but she tucked her head down and his lips brushed her hair. Again he laughed.

"Come, little girl, don't tease me that way."

"I ain't teasin' you, Lem! You mustn't kiss me like that!"

She broke from his arms and stepped back a pace, and her face was pale now, her breathing heavy.

"Can't see us from the house, Nell, for these bushes. Besides, it don't make no difference to Mother. She knows we're promised."

For a moment she stood silent, her gaze wandering from his eyes to the rose-bushes, then on down the trail and across the moun-

tain. The hawk no longer was visible, and the cow-bell was stilled. Oddly enough, she noticed these things, and the sense of being entirely alone with a great problem came to her. Her life's problems had been few, and now this one seemed ready to weigh her down.

She and Lem were promised, it was true; and from that hour his caresses had never been unwelcome, but last evening — She had been roughly reared, but from some mysterious source her nature had received that touch which caused her to instinctively feel the wrong of accepting the embraces of more than one man. With one it was all right, her simple creed of fidelity and virtue said, for then it was the heart that spoke, and in the mountains the heart held nature's and man's highest law. But she was promised to Lem! And Daniel — yes, Daniel had come too late. He it was who had no right. She must disobey the law of the heart and answer to the law of the will, the law of the head, for she was promised — and Mother Belden had taught her that a Belden never broke a promise. Kneeling before that sacred imprint on the wall, she had said it.

Lem had stared at her in astonishment as she stood before him, silent, and then he had

walked over to a boulder and sat down, and was moodily picking up pebbles and tossing them at nothing. His jaws were hard-set and there was a strange look in his eyes. Her battle was quickly fought and decided. She would be a Belden.

"I'm sorry, Lem," she said, going to him, and sitting down beside him. "I reckon I was right in sayin' you didn't understand girls. It ain't no wonder, though, for they don't always understand themselves."

"I sure don't know what's come over you, Nell," he replied, turning toward her. "What made you act like that?"

Then the feminine came to the fore and she laughed — a little nervously and a bit coquettishly. The one drop of Eve's blood was mastering.

"You ain't never saw many girls, Lem, but I reckon that if we keep on bein' promised you'll find out a heap o' things about 'em from just me."

"A heap o' puzzlin' things, you mean, don't you, Nell?"

His eyes were watching her hungrily, for the red was coming back to her cheeks, and he felt the resentment melting from his heart, but he

could not resist this very masculine desire to make a little fling at the foibles of her sex.

"Maybe so — but no one can't work them kind o' puzzles."

He slipped his arm about her, and though she trembled a little, she made no protest. Bending down, he kissed her again.

"We ain't goin' to quit bein' promised, are we, Nell?"

"I'm Zeb Belden's daughter, Lem, an' Mother says there ain't no Belden ever broke a promise."

"I hope that's true."

She was silent again for a moment, but in the great happiness that was sweeping in on him like the rush of the tide, the man took no notice of her silence. Finally she spoke, slowly, as though carefully weighing each word.

"It must be true, for she says it when she kneels — there — you know, Lem."

"Yes, I know. I've seen her kneelin' there. She must have promised — your father — something when she put them hand prints there."

"He was dead when she made them prints."

"I know it, but them's the bindin'est kind — promises to the dead."

The shadows were beginning to lengthen on the mountain side, and the cow-bell was sound-

ing again, this time farther away, but closer to the house. It soon would be time to do the evening chores. The man and the girl walked slowly back up the trail. Mother Belden stood in the doorway, and invited Lem to enter the home, but he declined.

"I'm goin' to do the milkin' for Nell to-night," he said, and picking up the buckets, he went on to the small corral, where the cows were beginning to gather.

The girl followed, and together they attended to the work. Then they returned to the house and strained it into the great jars.

"Wish we was doin' this in our own home, Nell. It would be fun, then, sure enough."

His eyes were bright for love of her.

"Don't believe there'd be much fun in milkin'," she replied, smiling a little.

"Yes, there would, too, on account of love, Nell. Love drove poor Jerry mad, but there ain't nothin' in the world greater than love!"

Long after he had gone and after night had drawn its veil over the mountains, the girl stood out under the tree looking up at the stars. The plaintive cry of a night-bird came from down in the shadows where the rose-bushes marked the turn of the trail.

"We're promised," she whispered. "And a Belden ain't goin' to break no promise. Daniel must not kiss me again. We're promised! We're promised! But he said there wasn't nothin' in the world greater'n love!"

CHAPTER IX

THE MORNING AFTER

WHEN Phil opened his eyes the next morning after the mysterious shot from the conservatory, he found that while he had slept the storm had spent itself, and now the mountains were lying fresh and green in the sunshine. The breeze that came in at his window was sweet with fragrance pilfered from the wild flowers and the pines.

He had slept soundly, and the few dreams that had come were of the "Courier" office, of the clicking of typewriters and the hurried coming and going of many men, so that when his lids were raised, he looked about the room for a moment in bewilderment, trying to command his senses. Then, with the suddenness usual to such moments, realization of the true situation flooded him. He was a prisoner in a strange mountain castle. A yawn came to his lips, but was strangled in a muttered exclamation of pain as he flung out his arms and a

sharp twinge reminded him of a wounded shoulder.

"Ouch! Confound the man behind the gun." He arose carefully and sat down on the side of the bed. "Don't believe I lost enough blood to bother, though!" he added, coming to his feet, and noting that he felt no weakness or dizziness.

He moved his left arm again and winced at the pain, but he had an idea that the flesh simply was stiff and sore about the track the bullet had ploughed, and that by judicious movements of the arm he would soon be able to use it without trouble. He was putting his theory into practice and was donning his clothing, not, however, without many grimaces and "oh's," when Le Foure himself called to inquire concerning his condition. The faithful Daniel accompanied him.

"Daniel has much skill with hurts, Monsieur. I would suggest that you permit him to examine your shoulder."

"All right, go ahead, Dan," replied Phil, seating himself by the window.

The man quickly demonstrated that Le Foure's praise was not misplaced, for he removed the bandages with fingers as deft as

those of a trained physician, and soon was examining the wound in an intelligent way.

"Some bits of cloth are stickin' in the shoulder, Mister, an' I reckon I'll have to do just a little cuttin' to keep pus from formin'. I won't hurt much."

"I'll grin and bear the pain, but what will you do for instruments?"

"My knife is very sharp." He drew a long, slender-bladed knife from his pocket.

"And the abiding-place of countless millions of bacteria," responded Phil.

Daniel smiled.

"Reckon you mean it might poison. I'll fix that."

He struck two or three matches and held the blade in the flame for a time, and then carefully wiped it with cotton Le Foure had brought.

"Where did you learn those tricks?" asked Phil, after a few slight incisions had been made, and Daniel was again dressing the wound, applying a salve to it.

"Can't get no doctor right quick in the mountains. A man's got to learn how to look after such hurts. Bullet wounds ain't so uncommon in these parts as they might be."

Elmore looked him full in the face, but no

emotion was written there to show that he was more than passingly interested in events that had taken place during the night.

"You'll soon be all right," said the mountaineer, and withdrew.

"I am very much concerned about this affair," said Le Foure, after Daniel had gone.

"Let not your heart be troubled. It is a mere trifle, I assure you, to capture a man and have him shot up by a skulking assassin."

"But I know nothing of it!"

"I believe it. If what you do not know were printed, bound, and illustrated, it would make a most interesting volume — for you."

The sarcasm of Phil's speech was not lost on the other, and his eyes narrowed as he studied the face of the speaker.

"The fellow must have mistaken you for me," he said. "But I cannot understand who it could be."

"Nor how he kept from breaking his neck in going out of that window," added Phil.

"That was simple. He had brought a long ladder from the stables. I found it lying under the window this morning. Evidently, he threw it down after descending."

"I suppose Daniel did not hear the shots."

"No. He has a nice room over the granary and sleeps soundly."

"And how about Lem Johnson?"

"He lives in a cabin a mile away."

"It could not have been a servant, for he went out the window and tumbled the ladder down."

Le Foure sighed, and the melancholy look came into his eyes again.

"No — not a servant. But who? Who? The game is deeper than I thought!"

"What game?"

Le Foure shrugged his shoulders and threw out his palms in his characteristic French way.

"Monsieur either knows or he does not. It does not matter. If he knows, he fully understands that the bullet was intended for me; if he does not know — I do. In either case, I would advise Monsieur to keep close to his room after he retires."

The Japanese servant tapped at the door and brought in a dainty breakfast, and Le Foure withdrew. Phil was completely puzzled. Had he not known that Daniel was in the hall below but a moment before the shot was fired, he would have believed him guilty, but it was preposterous to believe that he could have closed

the door, hastened around and clambered up the ladder into the window in time to have done the shooting. Clearly, it was impossible, and Daniel must be eliminated from the problem. The man who fired the shot had gained access to the house while Madame and Daniel were in the dining room below. It could not have been a servant; burglars did not haunt these mountains, and whoever it was had without doubt gone to the house with murder in his heart.

When he went to the music room an hour later, Phil was pleased to find Mrs. Elmore at the piano, running her fingers idly over the keys.

"Playing to Mose again?" he asked, and she laughed.

"No, Mose has quite deserted me this morning," she answered, turning and facing him. "Probably he lost sleep during the night's excitement and is napping now."

"But you have lost little sleep, else your cheeks and eyes bear false witness."

She arose and curtsied with old-fashioned grace.

"I am beholden to you, sir. One would think it was a pink tea instead of a consultation of prisoners."

"Prisoners? Nonsense. Why, we have no end of privileges. I inquired, and find that this is a sort of an Uncle Tom's Cabin, and our principal obligation is to pay obsequious homage to Simon Legree and his dogs."

"Simon — Oh, you mean Daniel."

"The faithful. Yes." And then he told her of his conversation with Le Foure, and of the regulations laid down for their conduct.

"I am thankful the hills are not forbidden us," she said. "I love to 'communion hold with Nature in her visible forms.'"

"Then I would suggest a walk — or, perhaps I had better say, 'a climb' — this afternoon, and we'll see what variety of languages she will speak. The sun will have the mountains dry by that time."

She vowed she was eager for a chance to explore the wilderness, and so it was arranged to set forth immediately after luncheon, though she said she feared he was scarcely in condition for such exercise.

Madame did not present herself during the morning, but Le Foure conveyed to Phil her inquiries concerning his wound. She was suffering from a very severe headache, he said, and must remain quiet for the present.

After the brief talk in the music room, Phil found the hours dragging slowly. His fellow-prisoner went to her room and remained there, and he was forced to seek solace in a nervous pacing of the front veranda, with an occasional stroll about the yard. There was nothing to show where the midnight prowler had been except one or two places where the ladder had gouged holes in the ground, and these could offer no clew. Daniel was not visible, and the place seemed deserted. Phil turned toward the veranda, but paused, and stood listening.

From some uncertain point across the ridges and ravines came the faint sound of a hunting-horn, its notes long-drawn, and then sharp and crisp, rising and falling with peculiar cadence. Then silence. But only for a moment. Daniel came out of the stone granary, and, facing to the east, placed a horn to the corner of his mouth and sent an answering signal floating across the mountains, after which he went back to the stone building, giving Phil not the slightest heed.

"Wonder if that means more prisoners or whether it's the signal to execute the ones already here?" muttered Phil.

But there was no one to answer the question, so he went back to the veranda and sat

down. Evidently the signals did not excite Le Foure, for he did not appear. Almost an hour passed, and then a horseman was seen coming up the trail from the valley, and as he drew closer, Phil recognized the rider as Lem Johnson. He rode up past the stable, and dismounted in front of the house.

"Good mornin'; where's Daniel?"

The young mountaineer's cheeks seemed less ruddy than usual this morning, and his eyes roved restlessly.

"Hid himself in the corn crib the last I saw of him, just after blowing that horn. Perhaps — no, he's coming now."

Lem turned in the saddle and regarded the man coming toward them, and a little more of the tan seemed to fade from his cheeks. He spoke no word until Daniel came up to him.

"Here's the mail," he said, handing over a bundle of papers he had held under one arm. "Any orders?"

"I'll take the mail up and find out. Wait."

Daniel tapped at the door casing and then entered the house, and Phil saw Lem's sullen gaze following him. On the mountaineer's face there was also stamped traces of surprise and mystification.

"Didn't see anything of the revenuers coming after our friend Dan, did you?" asked Phil, playing on the young man's tender spot.

"Revenuers? Huh! Don't reckon no revenuers will get Dan." He leaned over and fumbled with the fastenings of his saddle girth as he spoke. "Is Le Foure sick this morning?"

"No, just scared, I think. Everybody's well but me."

"What's the matter with you?"

Lem's stare was full on him, and the question seemed freighted with more than passing interest.

"Bullet ploughed a furrow along my shoulder. That's all."

The horseman looked away for a moment, and then he faced the man on the veranda again.

"How?" he asked simply.

"Attempted assassination at midnight. Assailant escaped through the second-story window. That's about the way the 'Courier' would tell the story in headlines. And then it would add this: 'No clew to would-be assassin — but the police expect important developments soon.' They always do, you know."

"Reckon I could name the man — Crazy Jerry."

"Crazy Jerry?"

"Yes. Heard about him? Went mad over a girl, an' runs wild over the mountains when the spell's on him. It's worse when it storms."

"So I've heard."

"He was at my cabin last night, but insisted on puttin' out into the storm to hunt Rosalie. She lived here, you know, an' when the spell's on Jerry he don't know she's dead, but thinks they're hidin' her from him. How bad are you hurt?"

"Just a scratch. Le Foure thinks the bullet was meant for him."

"Shucks! He don't think you shot *yourself*, does he?"

"Look here, Lem, you speak as though I am one who would be shooting at him."

Lem leaned forward, rested his elbows on the horn of the saddle, and calmly surveyed Phil.

"Yes, I reckon you might pull a trigger if the gun was pointed his way. I ain't no damn fool!"

"Pardon me. I didn't know. These mountains seem full of them."

A scowl settled on Lem's face, but finally disappeared as a grin came to his lips.

"Reckon the neighborhood's gettin' fuller of 'em right along," he observed.

Daniel stopped further discussion by coming out and curtly informing Lem that there was nothing more for the morning. As the young man rode away, Phil turned to Daniel, who was gazing steadily at the horseman.

"Pretty likely young man, eh, Daniel?"

"Huh! Yes — damned likely!"

He strode away toward the granary and vouchsafed no further word. And Phil blew many smoke rings, and in the haze he saw stirring visions. He glanced at his watch. An hour yet until luncheon! He held the watch to his ear; yes, it was running, but surely the hands had caught! He tired of the hills and the trees, and entered the house. No one was in sight, so he mounted slowly to the next floor, intending to seek his room. In the library he saw Le Foure with newspapers scattered around over the table.

"The library was one of my privileges, I believe," he said, walking in and seating himself. Then, without waiting for a reply, he picked up a paper. "Ah, my friend, the 'Courier.'"

Le Foure looked annoyed, but naught but courtesy was in his tone as he answered:

"Certainly. The papers are at your disposal."

"Thanks, I'll — say, you've scissored out the very columns I wanted to read."

The little man sprang to his feet and stood facing Phil across the table, and now his restless eyes were shooting sparks of fire.

"You admit it, then?" he snapped. "Have a care how far you carry your American impudence. I can shoot straighter in the light than in the dark!"

Phil leaned back in his chair and regarded him in amazement.

"Well, I'll be — Say, is any one in these Ozarks sane?"

"Why did you wish those columns I clipped?"

"Good heavens, man, it was the deciding game of the series between the Cubs and the Giants."

"The Cubs? Giants? What riddle is it you speak?"

"Riddle the devil! The whole world was watching that ball game — and you've clipped it and threatened pistols. Your club must have lost."

There was a moment of hesitation, and then Le Foure turned to the safe, the doors of which stood open, and took from one of the drawers several newspaper clippings. Selecting one, he

looked at it carefully on both sides and then spread it on the table.

"There is the story of that silly game. Read. No, — I'll hold it spread out on the table for you. This side alone concerns that nonsense."

"That expression would be enough to prove you a foreigner," laughed Phil, bending over the paper, which the other held out on the table.

After finishing the "Courier's" story of the great contest, he leaned back in his chair and picked up the other papers one by one and glanced over them. They were from various cities, — New York, Washington, Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, — and nearly every one had been scissored, nothing being left to give the slightest clew as to what had been taken. Finally he threw them all aside and arose to his feet again.

"Are you quite satisfied, Monsieur, with your study of the papers?"

"I'll be hanged if I am. They beat us two to one."

CHAPTER X

"JUST BECAUSE"

SEVERAL times Phil repeated the test of holding his watch to his ear to see if it had not really stopped, so slowly passed the time, but at last the morning dragged its weary hours away, and the silent little Japanese had served luncheon to a party that essayed brightness of spirits, but which lapsed into frequent and extended periods of silence, for it is doubtful if the minds of any two at that table were running in the same direction.

And it was not long after they had left the table until two people — a man and a woman — were making their way down the mountain side toward a gulch that led to a most charming spring a mile distant. Le Foure had assured them that it was a beautiful locality, and already were they finding it so. However, before the courteous Le Foure permitted them to depart, he insisted on a bit of what he called "business." A shrill whistle twice repeated had brought

Daniel and his bloodhounds hastening toward the house.

"Curtain rises — enter Simon Legree," whispered Phil to his companion.

"Just a bit of business," said LeFoure suavely. "Will each of you kindly leave a small token — a kerchief, a glove, or some such trifle? It will assist the dogs in case you lose your way in the mountains." And each had tossed a kerchief to Daniel as they turned to leave.

They followed the trail up which Nell and her mule had come the day before, and as they passed the rock on which the rattler had coiled to dispute the farther advance of the girl, Phil remembered, and for fear that they might also meet such a disputant, he stopped and cut a heavy walking-stick from a near-by scrub-oak tree. Then they tramped onward, chatting gayly. Where the trail turned, Phil glanced up and saw where Lem had sprawled himself while watching Daniel and Nell. Here the way grew less rough, and led along a gentle slope softly carpeted, and shaded by oak and persimmon trees, with wild flowers dotting the slope here and there.

"Isn't it delightful," she was saying, "that you stumbled upon this mountain romance be-

tween Lem, Daniel, and Nell? It will enliven our indeterminate imprisonment."

"Very delightful," he responded. "I wouldn't be in the least surprised if it kept us from perishing from *ennui*."

"What a sweet morsel for a dull afternoon over the tea-cups! A girl, a rattlesnake, a gallant rescue, another lover, and — a six-shooter, did you say?"

He glanced back at the rocky ledge where Lem had stalked the faithless Nell and the man who had robbed him of her love.

"Yes," he replied. "I believe I did say something about six-shooters."

They turned from the main trail and followed a smaller path down into the gulch leading off to the left. Occasionally they found the path obstructed by huge masses of rock, but it lay in the peculiar strata formation common to that region, and afforded them irregular steps by which they could make their way to where the pathway once more knew the ground.

"I do not believe those dogs could ever follow our trail up this gulch," she said, dropping down on to a boulder, and wielding a fan vigorously.

Phil did not believe so, either, but when he

leaned against a tree and stole sly glances at her sparkling eyes, at the slender figure in white outlined so sharply against the green of the mountain side in the background, and saw the winsome smile just faintly dimpling the glowing cheeks, he heard his heart whispering to his tongue, and he obeyed the command.

"Little you know of the sagacity of these terrible bloodhounds," he replied very gravely. "They could follow our trail the same as you read a printed page, and doubtless we should be torn to pieces by them if we tried to escape."

His conscience stabbed him as he saw the startled look that leaped to her eyes, but he had no desire whatever to escape from captivity with her. True, those awful land frauds in Texas were going unexposed by a "Courier" special representative, and up in Chicago another Philip Elmore doubtlessly was raving over the disappearance of his wife — but that Elmore was a brute, and deserved no sympathy from this Elmore. Phil was not possessed of a great amount of evidence of this fact, but he had quite decided the point. The other Philip Elmore was not the man she could love with all of the intensity of which he believed her nature capable; doubtless she had sacrificed

herself because of a mistaken idea of duty to some family arrangement, but now — by George, an idea! — now she was running away from the rascal! He almost laughed aloud as it all became clear to him in that flash of his thoughts. In two winks of the eye he recalled how she had sought seclusion in the Chicago station, how startled she was when he addressed her to return the lost sleeper ticket. She was endeavoring to escape from the Bluebeard Elmore, and if the fellow should by chance trail her — well, Philip Elmore, formerly of Tennessee, could shoot as well as ride to hounds! He had told her that he admired the six-shooter brand of love-making — and he told himself now that he was fiercely in earnest.

"What are you thinking of when your lips draw together like that?" she asked, and he saw that she was watching him curiously.

"I'm planning my battle with Daniel's dogs, if need be — *or with any other hound that dares follow you!*"

The half-smile suddenly left his lips and he stepped toward her, his eyes looking full into her own as he voiced the last words. Her gaze dropped, and the color slowly faded from

her cheeks, but she sat unspeaking. Finally he broke the silence.

"It cannot be much farther to Bell Spring. Shall we go on?"

She arose without a word, and they walked on, neither speaking for a time. A tiny rill was flowing through a rocky channel below, and the clearness of the water gave evidence of the presence of a spring near by.

"Who do you think might follow me?" she asked, at last. "For of course you refer to some person."

"Well, I thought — Oh, nobody in — of course —" He paused in confusion while she looked up into his face very gravely. "That is — I thought that — that perhaps Daniel might follow us," he concluded rather lamely.

"But you said the hound who followed *me*."

"Yes, but — of course I meant *us*."

"Oh!"

It was such a simple little word, but it occurred to Phil that he never would forget just how she spoke it at that moment. He helped her across the little stream, and their laughs rang together and relieved the tension when her foot slipped from a rock and splashed a

bit of water on her skirt. Then they clambered up the side of the hill to where a rill of crystal water was pouring out from under a shelving rock. From out of the cliffs scrubby trees were growing, forming a pleasing shade for the boulders beside the spring, which furnished them with seats.

"You see," Phil said, turning to her, "I've figured it out that Daniel is a sort of walking delegate for the Horn-Blowers' Union, and as I have never taken the oath, he may seek to do me harm."

"A very likely theory, sir — providing you know aught of the gentle art of horn-blowing as practised in these mountains."

"Know aught of it?" He laughed lightly. "Had I known less of it I would not be here."

"I'm too lazy and comfortable just now to fatigue myself with riddles."

"Here's the answer: had I been less the fox-chaser and lover of the pack, I would not have been exiled from my Tennessee to Chicago with orders to prove myself competent to do something besides set Diana and Drum and Jumbo — and all the rest of the beauties — wild with the music of my horn."

"I don't blame you," she replied. "I believe

I should enjoy a ride across the hills in the moonlight, the pack in full cry just ahead, and my horse taking the logs and the low fences!"

"Wouldn't you, though! And when dawn came, you'd sit your horse with the rest of the party on some high peak, and as the sun came peeping over the ridges and stealing the mists from the plateaus, you would hear the hounds still coursing down in the ravines where the shadows yet lay, and each member of the party would name his dog by its cry, and tell what its position was in the chase!"

"Bravo!" she cried. "Surely is Chicago exile for you."

He bowed to her, quoting:

"'And the red deer bound in their gladness free,
And the heath is bent by the singing bee,
And the waters leap and the fresh winds blow —
Lady, kind lady, oh, let me go!'"

"Suppose you try quoting your verses to the faithful Daniel — or, if you must address them to 'kind lady,' try Madame," she replied. "But your reference to leaping waters brings to my mind the fact that I am quite thirsty. There is the spring. Please be gallant."

"I would if I knew how. But how can a

fellow be that in this case, where there is no drinking cup?"

"Summon the fairies. Surely there must be fairies in this beautiful place."

"Pshaw! I have come near to forgetting my mountain cunning. Fair lady, behold!"

He drew a scrub-oak limb down, stripped several of the leaves from it, and dexterously wove them into a very serviceable cup.

"It may leak in spots," he said, dipping it into the crystal water, "but the secret is to drink out of the top faster than it can leak out of the bottom."

"A most ingenious arrangement," she responded, after taking a few swallows. "Certainly such ingenuity should be able to outwit a couple of bloodhounds."

"Sorry, but it can't be done. You see, the cup leaks quite a little, but it serves the purpose. So that plan is feasible. If a plan to thwart the hounds should 'leak' in the slightest degree, we would be 'goners.' We shall have to stick to the Castle and await developments."

"Which may be weeks in coming!" she cried impatiently.

"No — not more than a day or two."

She noted the decision in his tone.

"Have these strange people confided in you?" she asked.

"Well, not exactly, but I'm doing a bit of prophesying."

"But it's all a hideous muddle to me. I can't understand why these people should connect me with any scheme in which you may be engaged, as they evidently think you are. Why should they connect me with it?"

"For two reasons—both very good ones, too."

"The first, please?"

"That note of warning you sent me in St. Louis."

A look of amazement leaped to her eyes, and her cheeks went blood-red. He had not seated himself, but stood looking down at her with apparent unconcern, but, in truth, his eyes were noting every expression that came to her face, and he was secretly enjoying the astonishment and confusion that his words brought her.

"The — the — note I — sent?" she stammered, and her eyes refused to meet his.

"Yes, warning me that I was watched, you know. And I have never even thanked you."

"I had as well confess, I suppose," she replied. "But your knowing this mystifies me. Your back was toward me."

"But I faced the mirror. I really think your note was responsible for a black eye some rascal must have carried the next day."

"You knocked him down. Yes, I saw it. It was splendidly done, too."

She glanced out from under her long dark lashes and swept his athletic frame with her eyes. His hat was tilted back and his thumbs were hooked carelessly in his pockets as he stood before her, and she admired the width of shoulders and the poise of his head. Somehow, it all bespoke strength, and Le Foure had spoken truly when he said it was a way with women to admire the strong.

"But he got your note — and from that moment you were set down as my accomplice."

"Simple enough and plausible enough. Evidently you were seen to get the note from me. Then they went after the note to learn its secret. Reason number one for rating me as your accomplice. Now for reason number two."

"Your name and my name!"

Again the color surged into her cheeks, and she sat in silence a long time, abstractedly poking the pebbles with the heavy walking-stick he had handed to her while fashioning the cup of leaves.

"They — whoever we may mean by 'they' — could not account for Mr. Philip Elmore and Mrs. Philip Elmore except in one way, that we were — " He paused in confusion and swallowed a few times rapidly.

"That is," he began again, seeing that she did not speak or look up, "this mysterious 'they' thought we — must be — "

"Married," she said softly, as he again balked at the word.

"Thank you. That's the word I was choking on." And he laughed in response to the smile that flitted across her lips.

"But I do not see how they could have gotten that name in Chicago, when it really — is not my name at all!"

There was an exclamation from the man, and she saw his thumbs come out of his pockets, but the embarrassment of a confession was on her, and for a moment she turned abruptly from him and looked steadily down the gulch. When she turned toward him again, she found that he was standing close beside her, and when she glanced up into his face, there was an eagerness burning in his eyes that caused her to hastily drop her gaze once more.

"Not your name?" he asked slowly. "Then you are not — you are not — "

"Married? Is that the word you are choking on again? No, I am not married."

"Then may I ask your name?"

"Certainly. It is Tennyson Gray."

He whistled softly.

"Tennyson Gray! I know — the daughter of 'Grab — ' of James Gramball Gray."

She nodded.

"Yes, the daughter of 'Grab-All' Gray — as you started to say."

"I beg your pardon. I did not mean — "

"Certainly you did not. You spoke on impulse, and used the name some have bestowed on him."

"Merely a play on the name, 'Gramball.' It is easily corrupted into — the other."

"Especially when one likes money very much. And you know that James Gramball Gray is said to be friendly toward money."

"And I have heard that his daughter cares nothing for it. Her friends call her Tennys, I believe."

"Yes. Aside from money, my father admired Lord Tennyson the most. I am an only child, so I inherit the poet's name — and the other, I

suppose. But my friends are wrong. I love money very dearly. There, the confession is made. Shall we return to Uncle Tom's Cabin?" She arose to her feet, but her eyes did not meet his.

"Not just yet, please. Would you mind telling me how you came to take the name of 'Mrs. Elmore'?"

She laughed and ran down the mountain side a short distance. Then she paused and looked back. He had not followed, but was standing where she had left him.

"Please come. If I should see a rattler I should faint!"

In a moment he was at her side, and had taken the walking-stick. Where the little stream danced along its rocky channel below he helped her from stone to stone with care, though each time she gave him her hand he was seized with a great trembling.

"What was the reason for the name, did you say?" he asked, after an interval of silence.

"A bit of foolishness, to begin with. I was going away for a visit, and took a childish notion to show my self-reliance by going to the station alone, purchasing my own tickets, and all that sort of thing."

"But that doesn't explain."

"No — my foolishness went farther. It bade me travel as Madam instead of Miss. I thought it would shield me from some possible annoyances and be no end of fun. All girls like to masquerade a bit occasionally, Mr. Elmore."

"No doubt of that, but I do not quite understand — Hello!"

They paused, for before them was a man lying at full length on the grass beneath a tree. His face was toward the sky, and for a moment he gave them no heed, but lay mumbling something to himself. Then he sat up and gazed at them vacantly.

"Did you see her? Did you see her?" he asked.

"See whom? We saw no one."

"Rosalie! My Rosalie!" he responded, in a low voice, and the tears began to shine in his eyes. "She was here — just now. Tell me where she has gone! Yes, just now she was here, and I heard her voice, but it seemed to be up there among the leaves."

"Then you are Jerry, are you?" asked Phil.

"Jerry? Yes, that was what she called me before she went away. But now, sometimes

she calls me — no matter. You wouldn't understand."

He stood up and folded his arms, his chin sinking slowly down to his chest. He was gaunt as a greyhound, a great shock of reddish-brown hair crowning his head; a battered felt hat lay on the ground at his feet; his clothes were tattered in many places, and were splashed with mud.

"Was she very beautiful?" asked the girl.

"Oh, beautiful, like the young deer that I sometimes watch at play. She was rich and grand and glorious, my Rosalie. But she cared nothing for being rich. No, she looked at my cabin, and clapped her hands, and said it would be our home. But — something happened — and — what was it? Something — but I forget."

He did not raise his head, but stood with his chin on his chest, his gaze on the ground.

"There was a storm," suggested Phil.

"A storm? Storm? Yes, yes, yes!" He suddenly aroused and clasped his hands as he stared wildly about. "I remember now! They tried to keep her from me, but she taught me books — and then — what was it happened? What was it? It's going from me

again! Yes — a storm — and they said she was dead! But they lied! Ha, ha, ha! They lied! She is with me often. She sends her whisper to me through the leaves — and sometimes the stars tell me her words. And sometimes — "

He ceased speaking, and with hands outstretched, stood silent, his eyelids unmoving, as though listening. Then his arms were folded slowly, and his chin settled to his chest once more.

"Let us go," whispered the girl.

At that moment Jerry raised his head suddenly, and his dull eyes seemed to flash with some great emotion.

"Rosalie — you!" he said softly, his gaze on the girl.

She shrank back, her face blanching.

"No, Jerry, she is not your Rosalie," said Phil.

"You lie! I heard her voice. She was speaking to me from the trees, and then you came to separate us, but you shall not! Rosalie!"

With a spring he threw his arms about the girl, but at the instant her scream sounded, Phil had flung himself forward and grappled

with the madman. The struggle was short but desperate, and then Jerry's clutch was broken and he was sent staggering backward. Without attempting to renew the struggle, he buried his face in his arms as he lay on the ground, and they heard him sobbing and crying out the name of the lost one.

"Poor devil!" Phil said, as he turned away. "I didn't mean to be cruel to him."

"Your face is very white," replied the girl. "I think that lame shoulder must have suffered in that struggle."

"Yes, it does hurt a little." Then he looked back at the prostrate figure. "Poor devil!" he said again, softly. And into her eyes there came a soft glow.

Tennyson Gray did not prove herself a brilliant conversationalist on that return walk, and, after one or two ineffectual attempts to draw her into a connected discussion of events, Phil contented himself with walking silently by her side, for he had thoughts of his own that did not encourage an exchange of trivialities. Somehow, something was singing within his heart, and he was content simply to hearken to that song. The metamorphosis of Mrs. Philip Elmore, wife of a brute (he smiled at

the thought), into Miss Tennyson Gray, a thoroughly companionable maiden, was the cause of it all on his part. Tennyson! Decidedly an odd name for a girl — but then *she* was different from other girls, so it would have been a bit incongruous for her to have been Nancy, or Mary, or Kate, or any one of a dozen names, each of which was pretty enough, but — well, so many girls were Nancy, or Mary, or the others. And girls were all pretty much alike. But Tennyson Gray was very different, he told himself, and smiled contentedly in his blind ignorance of the fact that, ever since Adam, young men had been rejoicing that the certain girl was different — widely different — from the others of her sex.

And he rather liked the abbreviated form, Tennys. It came trippingly from the tongue, and vaguely it suggested a mental picture of her. He knew that if the name had been given him in Africa, and he had been asked to describe the possessor he would, without hesitation, have verbally sketched this girl, slender, graceful with health, well poised in mind; in fact, the girl and the name were mates. But she was the daughter of "Grab-All" Gray, the millionaire, to whom many fawned and whom

as many hated for his greed. The song was not sounding so joyously in his heart now. As the daughter of James Gramball Gray she was almost as far removed from him as she was as the wife of Philip Elmore, brute. True, those Tennessee acres that he would inherit were not few in number nor trifling in value — yet in "Grab-All" Gray's world he would be naught but a fox-hunting beggar.

"Are you tiring?" she asked, as they slowly ascended the trail to the mansion.

"'Tiring'? As Le Foure would say, 'Madame jests.'"

"You drew such a long breath — a sigh, some would call it — I thought it weariness."

"Not at all. I was but rejoicing that Simon Legree had not sent his dogs after us. And I was pondering on a question you have not answered."

"I am still on the witness stand, sir — but not sworn."

"How came you to choose the name you did for your masquerade?"

She paused to pluck a flower from the rose-bush, and after inhaling its fragrance, she stood for a moment nervously pulling out the petals and dropping them to the ground.

"Well, sir, was there any reason why I should not choose it as well as that of Mrs. John Smith — or any other?"

"Not at all. There was no reason why you should not — but was there a reason why you *should?*"

"Such conceit!" She laughed a little nervously. "But — there — yes, there was."

The song was swelling louder again, and he almost feared she could hear it. He plucked another rose and held it toward her.

"That rose is about done for. Please accept this one. The reason was — what?"

"Such beautiful roses — thank you. I'll not torture this one. The reason? Why, the very best a woman can have."

They had reached the veranda steps, and he paused. He spoke no word, but when she looked up into his face she read that persistent question in his eyes, and the tint of the rose came again to her cheeks.

"Just because!" she exclaimed, and then laughingly ran up the steps and into the house.

CHAPTER XI

MADAME MAKES AN OFFER

THE millionaire who had established this mountain home had not been content with expending large sums of money on the residence alone, but the granary also gave evidence of his lavish expenditures. This was constructed of stone, the building being a story and a half in height, and of generous proportions otherwise. Evidently it had been his idea to house his stable servants there, for there were two rooms above the corn and oat bins that were arranged for occupancy. One of these was now the home of Daniel, while the other remained unoccupied. Le Foure had offered it to Lem, but he had declined, and insisted on retaining the cabin on the mountain side as his habitation.

A stairway led to a small landing above, and the two rooms opened off from this, the landing being finished very plainly in oak and pine, and the rooms being very cosy and inviting.

They were well ventilated, and each window was shaded by an awning, the same as those which shaded the windows of the Castle.

This building had been studied very carefully by Phil during the morning, after Le Foure had told him that Daniel had his room there, for there was enough of the detective instinct in Elmore to tell him that a man's sleeping room generally held many clews to events that remained mysteries without these clews. He was a prisoner in this strange place, and yet he believed that the master of the place, Jean Le Foure, was in greater danger than he. Last night's affair, in which he received a shot from the dark, strengthened this conviction, for he had no doubt that the bullet which ripped a bloody furrow across his shoulder was intended for Le Foure.

He had abandoned every other theory as improbable, and while this one deepened the mystery somewhat, it also drew him a little closer to the frail, bloodless Le Foure, who evidently was playing some desperate game and was surrounded by treachery where he most needed and had a right to expect loyalty. That there was in Le Foure's mind at least a faint suspicion of some degree of disloyalty on

the part of Madame, Phil was certain. The look of melancholy that crept into his eyes so often when speaking of her was proof of this, and, besides, Madame's words to Daniel the night before evidenced it.

Lem's theory that Crazy Jerry had entered the house and fired the shot was not acceptable. It was very doubtful, in the first place, if Jerry had a firearm, and, in the second place, it was scarcely believable that the madman would be so stealthy in his movements. He might kill if he believed, in his insanity, that his Rosalie was being kept from him, but the madness that sent him roaming the mountains in the storm and darkness, crying out for her who was lost, would not prompt him to creep quietly into an upper window to hide among the flowers until discovery seemed certain, and then to fire and make a dash to escape. Rather would he have come thundering at the door of the residence and then attempted murder, perhaps, as a means for rescuing the lost Rosalie. Jerry did not fire the shot; of that Phil was convinced.

"Probably the 'Courier' is burning the wires trying to locate me," he thought, as he sat on the veranda after dinner that evening. "But if I live through these mistakes and blunders of

the feudists, I'll have a better story than those Texas land frauds."

It was growing dark. From down in the shadows of the gulches could be heard the cries of the night-birds, but aside from this there was profound silence everywhere. Even the piano in the Castle was stilled, for Tennys had pleaded the necessity for letter-writing, — to be censored by Le Foure, and mailed at his pleasure, — and Madame had declared music to be too stupid. Then she, too, had ascended the stairs. In the library, Le Foure brooded over many papers, some of which bore brilliant seals and were tied with silken tape. Occasionally from the kitchens would come bits of song voiced in a strange tongue.

The dusk deepened, but Le Foure's cigars were good, and, ensconced in a comfortable nook of the veranda, Phil did not find the solitude unpleasant. Solitude and cigars! With the twentieth-century man the latter is an antidote for the former.

A figure came out of the granary and stood at the corner of the building a moment, silhouetted against the faint glow of the evening sky. It was Daniel, and Phil snuggled closer into his dark corner and held his lighted cigar

behind him as he noted that the other was looking toward the house.

For a full minute the figure stood motionless at the corner of the granary, and then the man walked slowly toward the house. Scarcely conscious of a reason for so doing, Phil slipped out of his chair and crouched lower in the darkness that now enshrouded the veranda. When near the house, Daniel again paused, but Phil could see that he still faced the house. Then Daniel moved slowly along parallel with the front of the house until he had reached the northeast corner, where he stopped, and Phil, peering out through the latticework of the veranda railing, saw him drop to his knees and remain there for a moment. Then he arose and retraced his steps to the southeast corner, where he again sank to his knees. His footsteps had been carefully guarded and were without sound, and now it occurred to Phil that Daniel was doing a bit of reconnoitering, and that his object in kneeling was to enable him to get the sky-line for a background, and thus catch an outline of any one who might be about the grounds.

Finally Daniel again arose, and the man on the veranda could see him moving toward the pine tree that stood close to the south side of the

house. Then there was a scratching, scraping sound, steadily rising, and Phil realized with amazement that the fellow was climbing the tree. Scrape, scrape, scrape! Higher and higher ascended the mountaineer until his hands clutched the lowest limb, and he drew himself up among the branches. With his mind vainly groping for a solution of the puzzle, Elmore crouched on the veranda and listened to the faint sounds that came from the tree as the climber moved about from one limb to another.

"What in the deuce is he after, I wonder?" muttered the watcher.

Still the faint sounds came from the tree, showing that Daniel had not secured the position he desired, and Phil ventured to cautiously lean out over the veranda railing and survey the situation, confident that the man in the tree would be too intent on his own designs to detect him. And what he saw caused Elmore to straighten up and place one hand on the rail, as though to leap over. His survey had revealed the significant fact that the tree was within ten feet of the library window, where Phil had seen Le Foure bending over his papers half an hour before, and the light streaming from that window was proof that he was

still there, an easy target for the assassin in the tree, for Daniel was an assassin in his heart. The night before he had suggested plunging a dagger into the master of the house, and doubtless he had come now to do murder, and the killing would always be mystery to even Madame.

An instant Phil hesitated, his hand on the railing, and his pulse pounding violently. He was powerless to prevent the murder, for a shout from him would not warn Le Foure, but probably would bring him to the window, where he would be shot down more easily. And then the pistol would silence the only witness to the deed. Must he stand idly by and see this thing done? But he could not prevent. He was willing to take his own chances with the mountaineer, but his shout might lure Le Foure directly to his death, whereas it might be that now he sat in a corner of his room where the man in the tree could not get the proper angle for a shot. It was a terrible problem. What a devil's nest this lonely mountain castle was!

He held his breath and listened. Not a sound came from the tree now. Was the fellow aiming? He clenched his hands and waited. Still no sound. Then a woman's voice was

raised in song, and for an instant he forgot the man in the tree as he listened to Tennys Gray. The song was being given carelessly, with many little breaks, as though the singer was busily engaged at something else and was scarcely conscious that she was singing at all. Then the voice was hushed, and Phil saw her come to the window and peer out into the night, and he prayed that she would not discover Daniel. In the light from her window he could see her as she leaned out over the casing; but she remained visible for only a few breaths. Then she drew her head back, and the man on the veranda heard her voice but faintly, as though she was humming softly.

But from the tree there came no sound, and Phil cautiously resumed his former crouching position. Could it be, after all, that the fellow did not seek to kill? Or was he waiting for Le Foure to shift his position and afford him a better target? Minute after minute passed, and still there was silence in the tree-top. But at last there was a faint sound, and then other sounds. Daniel was shifting his position. Then that scraping, scratching sound again, and Phil knew that the fellow was descending. The watcher heard him drop lightly to the ground,

and then walk quickly toward the granary. Slipping over the veranda railing, Phil followed. He heard Daniel enter the granary and mount the stairs, but as he crept closer to the open door he was surprised to hear the man descending the stairs again, and he barely had time to spring aside and flatten himself on the ground when Daniel came out, fastened the door with the hasp, and walked briskly away. Having played detective this far, Phil determined to continue the rôle a little longer, and followed a short distance in the rear of Daniel until he saw the fellow skirt the rose-bushes and swing off down the trail.

"He's going to a tryst with Nell." With this realization, Elmore gave up the pursuit.

But the mystery of the tree teased him, and he stood beside it and stared up at the library window. His staring brought no results, and he wandered on toward the granary. He would like to have a peep into Daniel's room. But could it be had?

Opening the door of the granary, he stopped a moment to listen, and then crept up the stairs cautiously, as though he half expected some one to rise up out of the darkness and surprise him. As he expected, he found the door of Daniel's

room locked. But a thought came to him that caused him to hasten down the steps and out of the building, pausing only to fasten the door behind him. Daniel's room was on the east side of the granary, on the side opposite from the residence, and Phil hurried around to that side, where, as he had hoped, he saw that the window was raised.

"Here's where I profit by a lively experience," he said to himself.

He had seen the ladder resting against the side of the stable and had no trouble in finding it, but a low growl from the kennels near by caused him to not linger. His shoulder was quite sore, but he had no trouble in carrying the ladder around to the granary and placing it under Daniel's window. Then he ascended.

"I wonder if I dare strike a light?" he asked himself, as he stood in the middle of the room and peered about in the darkness. "If I do not, this expedition is a fizzle. I'll risk it."

He found matches in his pocket, and soon a tiny blaze flared up. A lamp was on a table, and he lighted it, and then drew down the window shades.

"Now I feel like a genuine cracksman. But

I need not fear the police. That's one comfort."

He glanced about the room. On a wall was a picture of the Virgin, and beneath it hung a gold cross. A brass candelabrum was on a shelf, with the figure of Christ on the Cross carved on the candelabrum's base. It was evident that Daniel was a Catholic in religion. In one corner of the room was a brass-bound trunk, and Phil was quickly kneeling before this, endeavoring to open it. But it was locked, and the lock defied his efforts to pick it. After trying all of his skill and the few instruments he had, he gave up the effort.

On the bed lay a coat, and he ran his fingers through the pockets in the hope that he might discover a letter or something that would give him some clew to the identity of this mysterious mountaineer who spoke French so fluently and spoke longingly of Paris. There was not a scrap of paper to be found, but the coat was dirty and had bits of bark clinging to it, showing that Daniel had worn it while climbing the tree. Elmore picked up the garment, and then a slight exclamation escaped him as he saw a pair of field-glasses lying on the bed, the coat having been thrown over them.

In a flash the mystery of the tree-climbing was explained, at least in a measure. Daniel had used the powerful glasses from the tree in spying on Le Foure — doubtless endeavoring to read some of the private papers thus. Probably Le Foure had located his library on the second floor in order to be free from prying eyes without, but he had not thought of any one climbing the tree to spy. Evidently Daniel was playing his game for all the points. If only that trunk could be opened! He replaced the glasses and the coat on the bed, and knelt before the trunk once more. Perhaps he could come again with wires and conquer that lock.

Suddenly he threw up his head, listening intently. Surely that was a faint sound at the door! Or was it — Yes, by all the gods, a key was slipping into the lock. He sprang to his feet and blew out the light just as the key turned and the door was swung open. There was an interval of silence, during which Mr. Philip Elmore felt his heart throbbing in his throat. He would hardly confess to being a coward, but it was not a pleasing situation to be trapped here in this little room by the stalwart Daniel, who, doubtless, had heard him and was ready with a weapon. Cautiously Phil

began edging toward the window, but in the darkness his shoe struck a chair with a sharp rap. Fearing the sound would draw the fire of the one at the door, he sprang back to the wall.

"Monsieur!"

Another surprise, for it was the soft voice of Madame at the door. He did not reply. His brain was fertile in conjuring up possibilities, and now it occurred to him that Daniel and Madame might be together — while Le Foure brooded in the library — and perhaps the woman was seeking to lure him into betraying himself so Daniel could shoot.

"Monsieur!"

Again the call came, soft and low, and if she had evil in her heart, it was not betrayed in her tone. But he remained silent.

"How unkind of you, to not answer. Will you not light the lamp again?"

"The lamp? Why?" he asked, and quickly shifted his position, fearing a shot.

"Because it is so unconventional for us to be alone together in the dark." She laughed lightly. "We must be conventional, Monsieur, even here in the mountains." Again there came a low ripple of musical laughter from out of the darkness.

He drew out his match-safe and lighted the lamp. In the doorway Madame stood, smiling. She was dressed just as she had been at dinner, and the cluster of flowers was still tucked in her corsage, while she held the long train of her skirt daintily in one hand. A black shawl of finest spun silk had been around her shoulders, but it fell away from her white throat, and but enhanced the redness of her lips.

"I did not expect to entertain company, but you may come in."

"A poor welcome, but I am very forgiving of slights." She closed the door, locked it, and then turned again toward the man. "We will not be interrupted now."

"You are a daring woman, Madame."

She moved toward him, still smiling.

"Daring? Pooh! There is no daring about a certainty."

"But your husband?"

"Is quite busy." There was a shrug of her shoulders, and then she walked over to a chair and sat down.

"Or if Daniel should return?"

Phil was watching her closely, and he saw her eyes narrow quickly and a slight flush come to her cheeks.

"He return? Not as long as there are pink-cheeked babies with whom to hold dalliance!"

"Meaning Nell Belden, of course."

She nodded, and there was a scornful curl to her lip, but she did not speak.

"Oh, well, even the mountain folk must have their affairs, you know."

"Yes, I know, and little care I how many hours the ignorant baggage spends in his arms. If I did — if I did —!" She arose to her feet, her eyes flashing; but after a slight pause she broke into another laugh, and again sat down. "But I do not. She will sorrow enough."

"Of course you do not care," he answered, seating himself and looking at her carelessly. "Why should you care about your servants' love affairs?"

"Oh, why this duelling? You are a shrewd man; I am not a fool, myself." She suddenly leaned forward, and with her eyes scanning his face closely, she exclaimed:

"*Vous avez menti, en ce qui concerne ces coups de feu!*"

But he had learned to be wary with her, and did not let the flutter of an eyelid betray the fact that he understood her words.

"It is an unfair advantage to address me in French. I do not understand the language."

"Very well, then, I will use English," she replied, her face brightening, "I said that you lied concerning that shooting!"

He did not forget his cue, but straightened up as though startled at her words.

"Lied? In what way?"

"You were not in your room when you were shot!"

And now the surprise in his eyes was genuine as he sat staring at her.

"You are too clever to be lied to," he answered. "But how do you know this?"

She leaned back in her chair, and Elmore admitted once more that she was beautiful as well as clever.

"Monsieur is complimentary, but I must deny — though I prize his good opinion." She lowered her lids slightly, and his pulse throbbed at the look she gave him. "It was not clever to discover a bullet mark near the top of the library door casing."

"But your husband fired at me after I had chased the fellow."

"Yes — he fired north from the library. This bullet was fired south from near the top of the

stairs—possibly from among the flowers. The man was lying down when he fired, for the bullet ranged high. Is this, indeed, clever of me?"

"If I knew a stronger term, I would use it. Again I'll confess. I was close to the library when the shot was fired."

"It was generous of you to tell the other story—for me." She leaned toward him again, and her eyes burned into his. "What awakened you?"

"A woman leaving my room." He met her look steadily.

"And then you followed her?"

He nodded.

"Confession number—what is the number please?"

"You saw *us* in the dining room, and then you went back upstairs and were shot."

"Yes, I saw you and Daniel together—and was amazed when he spoke French."

"I knew it as well as if you had told me."

"Would you mind explaining?"

"Very simple. I found the bullet mark. It proved you had told a falsehood regarding the shooting. Why were you out in the hall? I became suspicious and determined to know.

"TOGETHER WE CAN WIN." — *Page 213.*

If my fears were right, I knew you would watch Daniel, so I watched you. Result, here we are. When I saw you mounting that ladder to Daniel's window I knew you had seen him the night before."

"If your husband but had half your acuteness—"

She stopped him with a gesture. Then she arose and stood before him.

"Listen, Monsieur. There are large stakes to be won by brains. I have claimed to possess some, and you have proven that your head is not empty. Together—"

She paused and glanced at him beneath her half-lowered lids. Then she leaned forward and laid her hand on his and smiled, and Philip Elmore would not have been of red blood had not the warmth of her soft palm caused him to catch his breath a bit sharply.

"You—you mean—"

"I do." She finished the sentence for him as he faltered. "Together we can win."

"But your husband—and Daniel?"

She snapped her fingers.

"Will you force me to say it? I know the trails out of this wilderness!"

"And you propose that I go with you!"

"Am I so repulsive, Monsieur, for one so — handsome — as even you?"

And then Mr. Philip Elmore did a most creditable thing. He blushed a fiery red.

"No — no — you are beautiful!" His voice was strangely hoarse as his eyes devoured her. "But this thing you suggest is impossible!"

"Impossible? It surprises me to hear *you* use the word."

"But it's all a muddle to me. I have been dragged to this place by a blunder. There is some big game and two or three smaller games, but I haven't any cards."

"I believe you when you say it was a blunder. As for the rest — if I hold the cards it is enough."

"I don't like travelling blindfolded. It — "

"*Sh — h-h!*"

She threw up one hand and stood listening. He sprang to his feet, for the latch at the outer door was being lifted.

"He left the little fool early!" she whispered. "Quick! The window!"

He blew out the light, and she threw up the shade as a step sounded on the stairs.

"You go first!" he commanded.

She caught up her skirts and slipped through

the window. He followed her closely, and when halfway down the ladder he heard Daniel's key in the lock. Madame had already reached the bottom, and Phil sprang lightly to the ground and carefully lifted the ladder from the side of the building just as a match was lighted in the room they had left. Madame had run to the corner of the building. He passed her with the ladder.

"Do not forget that it is a big game," she whispered, "and I hold enough cards for two."

She hurried away into the night, and he went on to the stable and replaced the ladder, after which he returned to the house, and when he saw that Madame was in the music room he passed on up the stairs. Le Foure still sat in the library, but the papers were no longer spread out before him. Instead, he sat with his head in his hands, brooding over some problem. Phil glanced down the hallway and saw that the door of the girl's room was open, and almost at the same moment Tennys came out, holding Mose in her arms, with her cheek against his glossy coat.

"I was starting to seek Madame," she said. "Is she below?"

"I think I saw her in the music room as I came in from the veranda," was his reply.

She went on toward the stairs, but the cat sprang from her arms and gravely marched down the hall after the man.

"That's a very cold-blooded desertion, sir," she laughed, shaking her finger at the cat.

"Mose," said Phil, a few minutes later, in his room, as the cat jumped up on the chair beside him, "you're a fool."

Mose did not seem to mind, but contented himself with regarding Mr. Elmore very sedately.

"Yes, sir, you're a fool for jumping out of her arms," he said.

And then he threw up the window and sat looking out into the night, across the mountains to where he knew the world was throbbing.

CHAPTER XII

"HIS NAME IS JOE"

AT the bottom of the stairs Tennys paused in indecision, for through the doorway she could see Madame Le Foure pacing the length of the music room. For only a brief portion of this tramp back and forth, back and forth, was the mistress of the Castle visible, but the girl saw that her head was drooped, much as she had often seen her father, "Grab-All" Gray, when some powerful combine was threatening his endless financial interests. At such times she had always and wisely withdrawn from his presence, leaving him to battle with his problems — (or was it his conscience?) — alone, as he desired.

And so at this time she stood hesitatingly on the lower step, watching this beautiful woman as she appeared at regular intervals in the view granted by the doorway. Madame's face was half averted, and the girl could not see her expression. But Tennys was lonely for the company of those of her sex, so she went on down

the hallway, but paused again at the music-room door, for now she saw Madame's face in the full light, and the look in her eyes was not a pleasing one. Her lips were drawn until a faint pucker showed at her chin, and her brow was gathered so that a deep, straight line divided it; her hands were swinging at her side, and at every few paces she would clench them spasmodically.

Madame heard the girl's step at the doorway, and turned, an eager light shining in her dark eyes, but as her gaze rested on the caller, the eagerness faded and fury seemed to be gathering there instead. For a breath, neither spoke, but stood looking into each other's faces.

"*You?*" The word came almost in a whisper from Madame.

Tennys nodded.

"Yes — I," she replied. "Am I intruding? I will return to my room."

"No, no — remain. I'm glad to see you. Really, I am."

The cloud vanished from Madame's eyes and a pleasant smile played about her lips. Tennys marvelled at it all, but she entered the room.

"I am a bit lonely to-night," she said. "Everything is so strange."

"I am very sorry for you. And your husband —"

"He is not my husband!" exclaimed the girl, her cheeks reddening.

Madame laughed in her easy way.

"The man upstairs? No — you have told us that. But up in Chicago — or elsewhere — he will be very uneasy."

Tennys sat down at the piano, and ran her fingers over the keys, but said nothing. Madame was watching her closely.

"But you will be permitted to return to your husband in a few days," she said.

The girl turned from the piano quickly.

"Please speak no more of my husband," she said. "I am weary of this foolishness."

"Foolishness?" Madame's eyes were very wide.

"Yes — foolishness. I have no husband!"

For a few moments there was silence, excepting the tick of the great clock that stood in the corner. Madame's eyes were no longer wide; on the contrary, they had narrowed.

"Ah — a widow?" she asked.

"No — just a maid. I never had a husband. My name is not Elmore. It is all a miserable farce — and I am weary of it."

Once more the clock was ticking loudly, and Madame sank into a chair.

"It is very surprise," she said, her English faulty for the moment. "Who is he upstairs?"

"Philip Elmore."

"Oh-h, now I see." Another smile flashed across her lips. "Monsieur Elmore is your sweetheart."

The red burned in the girl's cheeks.

"Nothing of the kind. Why, I have known him only —" She hesitated — "only a day or two!" (Could it be possible that it was but three days since she had first seen him? Surely — but no. It was on Monday night that he had bowed to her and returned the lost ticket, and this was only Thursday evening of the same week.)

"It is very strange," said Madame, "your choosing his name in Chicago, and all."

"How do you know I chose it in Chicago?"

Madame shrugged her shoulders. With another it would have been ugly, but Madame's shoulders were very pretty, and she handled them very prettily.

"It is too much to explain, my dear. But even here, in the mountain wilderness, we know

much of what is taking place out yonder in the world."

"As I said before, it is all very strange. I do not understand why I have been brought here thus."

"Possibly you could answer that question yourself by a bit of reasoning."

"Reasoning? How? I have stirred my brains into a snarl trying to reason it out."

"Begin by noting how you came to choose the name of Mrs. Philip Elmore — and then see where your reasoning will carry you."

To Madame's great surprise the girl arose from the piano and burst out laughing.

"If I begin there, I establish my base of reasoning in a girl's impulsive caprice, and my reasoning would lead me — well, perhaps into strange and beautiful dells where the flowers are fragrant and birds fill the air with marvellous melody, but the reasoning would never lead me to this imprisonment, Madame — never."

Again her laugh rang merrily, and Madame saw a baffling light shining in her eyes.

"Philip Elmore! It is a very pleasant name, but not especially pretty."

"It will answer the purpose, I presume. In

America we do not give our men 'pretty' names."

"But Monsieur Elmore is a very handsome man."

Madame's eyes were searching the face of the girl closely.

"Is he? I hadn't noticed. Still, I believe he is fairly good-looking."

The tone was careless, and Madame's face brightened perceptibly.

"Hadn't noticed it? It is difficult to understand. I was certain you would love this Elmore."

Tennys laughed gayly once more, and then curtsying before her companion, quoted:

> "It is well to be off with the old love
> Before you are on with the new."

"Ah, then I have your pretty secret at last. You are the fiancée of another."

"His name is Joe. It is not especially pretty, either, is it?"

"When the heart sings a name, it is always pretty, my sweet."

Tennys sobered a moment, and then seated herself carelessly on the arm of a chair, one elbow resting on the back.

"I never thought of it before just that way,

but I believe you are right." She nodded slowly, as if in contemplation of the thought. "Yes, I am sure you are. Even the name of 'Daniel' would be pretty if one loved him."

Madame's face paled suddenly, and she arose and went to the piano, where she fumbled for a moment with the music.

"No, I think I will not play, after all," she said, returning to her chair. "It was odd that you should mention Daniel."

"Was it? I don't see why. Of course, it all depends on one's view-point. Nell Belden would think it very odd not to mention his name."

Tennys was giving Madame but slight heed, and did not see the flush that stole the pallor from her cheeks, nor did she note the fire that flamed in the black eyes.

"Nonsense — Nell thinks only of Lem Johnson."

"Of course you pay no attention to the love affairs of your servants, but Mr. Elmore says Lem knows that Nell is false. In fact, Lem wished to kill Daniel last evening."

"Kill him? Are you quite sure, Ma'm'selle?"

"No—but Mr. Elmore is. Ask him."

"Thank you. I will. One doesn't wish their —servants — shot, you know."

"And yet —" Tennys paused.

"And yet — what?" asked Madame.

"I believe my sympathies are with Lem."

"Even to the six-shooter, Ma'm'selle?"

"That is a very serious statement, isn't it?" Tennys laughed a little, and then became serious. "But when one really loves — well, do not ask me. I am frightened at myself."

"You would dare much for your love! Is that it?" persisted Madame.

Tennys nodded gravely.

"I'm afraid it is."

"Afraid? Why 'afraid'?"

"Oh — because," she replied.

She slipped from the chair and walked slowly to the door, where she paused and bade Madame good night. Then she went up the stairs and to her own room, where she found Mose curled up as if awaiting her return. She caught him up into her arms and laughingly chided him for having deserted her. As she swung her door open she flashed a quick glance across the hallway to another door. It was closed, and no light shone above it, but as she lighted her own lamp and caught a reflection of herself

in the mirror, she saw that her cheeks were rosy.

A breeze slipped in at the open window, bringing with it a bit of fragrance from the rose-bushes. She blew out the light, after preparing for sleep, but instead of seeking slumber, she raised the shade and drew her chair up to the window. Mose sprang up into her lap and mewed proudly, while she murmured pretty little speeches to him and stroked his glossy coat. Then he stretched himself out comfortably, his front paws resting on the window sill and his body between her knees. And it may be that curious fancies came to Mose, as, of a certainty, there came to Tennys Gray.

The moon had risen, and its magic had blended the mountains and forests into a marvellous picture. Here and there a tall pine lifted its dark outline against the background of silver and appeared to touch the fleecy clouds that floated in seeming carelessness across the sky. Everything was delightfully unreal. Or was that other life the unreal one, and this the real? Was it true that a brawling, panting world lay beyond that dark mountain mantle that was unrolling itself before her in the moonlight? Was it true that those giant pines silhouetted against

the peaceful heavens were not really pickets on the boundary line of the universe? Surely it could not be true.

And yet, what was this thing that memory whispered? Out yonder — somewhere — Chicago was roaring and pulsating in an intermingling of gloom and glare; out there electric cars whizzed along the streets and over the streets, and electric pianos and phonographs made the night hideous, and great eyes blinked with electric leers from opticians' signs; out there trains stood puffing and wheezing and belching smoke in depots after a flight from the seaboard, and long lines of emigrants plodded stolidly out through the doors and up through the noisome, ill-smelling streets to other depots, just as they had done that night years — no, only days ago!

And out there was her father — her father, whom men called "Grab-All" Gray! Her lip curled a trifle at the knowledge that men had not been entirely unjust in their sobriquet. And there, also, was Joe!

Mose stirred slightly, and she bent low over him and coddled him. As she did so, a solitaire diamond on her finger caught a ray of moonlight and flashed it like a spark of fire into

her eyes, whereupon she forgot Mose and gazed long and steadily out at the moonlit mountains, her chin on her hand, and her elbow on her knee. Yes, that other world was the real world, and this one but a creation of magic! But —magic was not altogether a black art! In it there was much that was pleasant. And all of this was undreamed three short days ago — seventy-two hours! And Joe? She smiled a little there in the darkness. Only seventy-two hours — no, he would not be growing impatient for some word from her. Not just yet. The smile faded. Not yet? How long would it be before he would feel an impatience? He was very busy. Her father had told her so several times when she had mentioned the subject of Joe to him. But Joe was a very great success! Yes. Her father had said that he had a wonderful grasp of business details, and could quote stocks and bonds as Tennys could her A B C's.

Mr. James Gramball Gray approved of him, — and rather feared him when stocks were shaky, —and had been pleased to entertain him often at his home. And whenever the financial prodigy tucked Tennys in beside him and drove down the avenue in his automobile Mr. Gray smiled

contentedly, just as he did when Joe asked permission to pay his attentions to her seriously. And from that moment Tennys was never allowed to forget that the bond and stock phenomenon was a most desirable personage. And now — The moonlight flashed again from the solitaire, and, slipping it from her finger, she tossed it back of her to the dresser.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SIGNAL

"I WONDER what Jack would make of this," mused Phil, as he lay watching the brightening dawn.

It had been an uneasy night for him, and he yawned sleepily as the thought of Morden, the lawyer, ran through his mind. He had been wakeful much of the night, pondering on the problems that had come to him during the last few days, and when he did sleep, his dreams were weird conjurings of a beautiful siren who chanted to him in a subdued voice of a wonderful Some Place where she would give him everything. And then would come pistol-shots, and hideous faces would leer at him from the branches of many trees.

"Confound the woman," he grumbled, at least a dozen times during the night, when he would awaken and flounce around nervously. "It's just a little like Mephistopheles tempting Faust, only old Faust wanted everything and

I want nothing — at least nothing that *she* can offer."

And always he would then look up to the transom of his door to see if a light was shining through it. But there was not — and he felt a bit of childish resentment because there was not. How could the girl across the hall sleep so contentedly? Why didn't she get up and light the lamp as evidence that she was not sleeping? The light would shine in through his transom and would be a bit of comfort to him — and perhaps assist in banishing those unwelcome dream visions.

"Oh, you idiot!"

This was his final summing up at each waking spell, and after delivering this self-denunciation he would determinedly close his eyes and count, count, count, until the figures jumbled and he would sleep again. And now he welcomed the dawn that was sending its first gray to the mountain peaks. Jack Morden had a wonderful power of analysis, and Phil wished for him now, having a sublime faith in the lawyer's abilities, and doubting not that the whole thing would be made as clear as sunlight were his friend but here. But he was not. Phil yawned again.

The thought of escape was not in his mind. It had come once or twice, but each time he deliberately turned his thoughts into another channel. Escape? Pooh! It would not be so difficult, he believed, in spite of Le Foure's suggestion regarding the bloodhounds and the signal to the mountaineers. Of course there would be a bit of danger attached to such an attempt, but he had no doubt that he could escape if he wanted to. But that was the point. He did not want to. He had not wanted to escape when he knew the girl in gray as Mrs. Philip Elmore (the thought brought a very becoming red to his cheeks), and now that he knew her as Tennyson Gray — well, Daniel and his dogs could not drive him away from such a delightful situation. But he would have welcomed a clearer understanding of events about him.

By this time the mountains were clearly outlined in the morning light, though the sun had not risen, and as sleep was not possible, he arose and dressed, and was pleased to find that his wounded shoulder was improving rapidly under the attentions of the faithful Daniel. He stood at the window awhile, and the waving limbs of the pines and oaks seemed beckoning. He sat

down in a chair and rested his feet on the window sill and sighed in masculine contentment and comfort — but those leafy arms out yonder on the mountain side were ever beckoning.

Picking up his hat, he opened the door and stepped out into the hallway. It was very quiet. He glanced at the door across the hall as if he expected some morning salutation to appear in magic letters thereon. Then he closed his door with just a bit more of a slam than was necessary, and also found that his throat was suffering from a sudden tickling. So he coughed — twice. A very vexing silence still brooded, and, muttering something about pampered children of rich men being indolent and great sleepy-heads, he marched down the stairs and marvelled when he saw that the front door was standing open. The heavy rug in the lower hall stole the sound of his footsteps, and as he neared the door, a voice caused him to pause. There was no mistaking the voice; it was that of Tennys Gray, and her words caused the man to flush a scarlet red.

"Yes, I confess that I love you," she was saying, and Phil heard the unmistakable sound of a kiss. "Perhaps I ought not to say it, but I do — oh, I do!"

There was another kiss. The face of the listener became a deathly pale, and his hands clenched.

"How's that? No, we haven't known each other long — but love comes swiftly in these mountains. Will you take me away, my noble one, away to where the flowers always bloom, and where the birds will always sing for us? Yes, you must do that." (The listener's lip curled in disgust.) "You will be ready to fight for me, I know, if any one dares to interfere. Can you shoot? Mr. Elmore admires the six-shooter brand of love." (A rippling laugh sent the finger nails deeper into Phil's palms.) "And Mr. Elmore is — don't be jealous — but he is rather — well, nice."

"Thanks!" muttered Phil, with a world of sarcasm.

His sense of honor came to his rescue for a moment, and he turned to steal back up the stairs, but the sound of another kiss scattered all proper resolutions, and he whirled and made for the door again.

"I'll strangle the sneak!" he said hotly.

But at the door he stopped stock still, his eyes on the scene on the veranda — and then he laughed softly. Mose was perched up on

a chair, and before him the girl was kneeling, her back to the door. Even as the man looked, she kissed her fingers vigorously and then blew the kiss to Mose, who playfully struck at the hand with one paw.

"And, sir, you must tell me —"

"Ahem!" The man in the doorway cleared his throat.

She sprang to her feet and turned a very red and startled face to him. And then she burst out laughing.

"Oh," she cried, "how much of this foolishness have you heard?"

"Well, enough to give me a thorough understanding as to how best to make love." Then he walked over and lifted Mose out of the chair and sat down in it himself. "Mose, you have forfeited your right to this seat by your coldness."

It was a very daring act and speech, and for a moment the red that showed in the girl's cheeks was burned there by anger.

"Impertinent!" She turned toward the door.

Phil sprang from the chair and blocked her way.

"Kindly permit me to pass." Her words were icy.

"Not until you forgive me for my speech. I caught the spirit of your play and was a boy again."

She faced him in silence for a moment, but slowly the hauteur was fading from her eyes, and merriment was creeping in, and at last she surrendered.

"How foolish," she said. "It was all play, and I had no reason to take offence, I know. But it was just a trifle embarrassing to be caught playing with Mose just as I used to play with my dolls."

She turned toward the end of the veranda, and he fell into step beside her. Mose also followed them in their tramp back and forth, pausing as he did so to rub against the chair, and choosing to jump over the rounds of the chair rather than to pursue an unobstructed way.

"You were fond of dolls, of course. All girls are."

"But I was unusually foolish over them. I always had a weakness for conjuring them into all sorts of heroes and heroines, and if I ever had any genius at all it was for inventing ridiculous situations for my dolls to figure in."

"And this morning Mose was mustered into service as a doll."

"Yes," she laughed. "And he did very nicely, too. I really am quite fond of him, and when I slipped down to the porch this morning for a breath fresh from the dawn, I found him curled up on the chair. Before I realized it, I was a child again, with Mose for my doll. I did not dream of being caught at it."

"Nor did I dream of finding any one on the veranda at this hour. When I was in the hall I heard your voice, and — well, your words rather startled me."

She looked up into his face and then they both laughed. A small purse hung at her belt, and from it she extracted a copper.

"A penny for your thoughts — *then*," she said, smiling.

"'Another mountain romance,' thought I." He gravely took the penny and put it into his pocket. "These hills seem to be full of that sort of thing."

"And you listened?"

There was more of a question in her eyes than there was in her words, and he flushed a bit guiltily.

"Not long. I remembered the odiousness of eavesdropping, and turned back upstairs."

"But you came out."

He made no reply, and they covered the length of the veranda in silence. Then she spoke again.

"Why?" she asked.

"I heard a — sound — and I bolted for the door, expecting to — to —"

"To what?" she asked, as he paused. "To find me in disgrace?"

"No, no! Do not put it that way. I came out swearing to kill the man!"

He did not look at her, but kept his eyes on the morning mists that were now arising from the valleys. She was also looking elsewhere, and a great light was in her eyes. The faintest breath of perfume came to him from her hair, and a dozen rash impulses were his, but he spoke no word. A dewdrop on the leaf of a tree flashed like a priceless gem in the first beams of the rising sun; across the yard he saw the passionate flush of the wild rose; a bird took wing from a giant pine and a gladsome song came spilling down; high above the valley below them a hawk floated on motionless wing.

"Look!" She had left the veranda and was now pointing up toward the tower.

He joined her at the bottom of the steps,

and saw that the great glass ball on the tower was flaming with the first kiss of the sunrise, and some mystery of its composition was showing a myriad of hues in the rays that shot up from beyond the ridge of hills below.

"It is very surprising to find you up so early," said Phil.

"Another reminder that we have met but recently," was her reply. "My friends all know that I frequently ride in the Park before the sun is very high."

"There are horses in the stable," he suggested.

"Oh, I never ride at this hour without being accompanied by a groom," was her laughing answer, and she returned to the veranda.

He touched his hat in a token of respect.

"What's your wish this mornin', Miss? Shall I saddle Lightfoot or Lady Bess?" Then he caught step with her again. "Doesn't that prove my fitness for the position of groom?"

"So well done, sir, that I am tempted to resent your walking by my side. Grooms should know their place better."

"I hadn't thought of that. But wouldn't a plain companion do as well as a liveried servant?"

"Well, you know the conventions demand—"

"Bother the conventions! There is no such word in the lexicon of the Ozarks." He placed one hand on the rail and sprang lightly to the ground. "I'm going to get those horses without taking the trouble to apprise the well-beloved Daniel. What do you say?"

He paused and looked back at her. The glow of the sunrise was in her cheeks, and the sparkle in her eyes would have given him sufficient answer had she not leaned over the rail and said softly:

"I say it will be a glorious lark."

The stable, built of pine logs, stood a short distance from the granary, and Phil did not much fear being heard by Daniel. However, as he swung the door open, a sullen growl from the kennels near by warned him that it was not man alone against which he must guard. But he put trust in the belief that the hounds were chained, and entered the stable. There were five horses there, but he knew the horse kind as he knew his alphabet, and quickly selected the two most likely to prove fleet and easy saddlers. A side-saddle was found, and also a saddle for himself, and soon he led the animals out, making as little

noise as possible. At the veranda steps Tennys was waiting, bareheaded.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"In the Ozarks one is always ready," she laughed, and then, placing her foot in his hand, she sprang lightly into the saddle. "This habit isn't exactly the mode for riding, but—" She tossed her head, and the breeze caught a stray wisp of hair and flung it across her face like a caress. "Let's be off," she added.

By common impulse they turned into the trail up which Nell and her mule had come, and rode away, walking their horses for a time, lest the beat of hoofs should arouse the household. The way was narrow, but wide enough for Phil to ride by the girl's side.

"It's the first time for months that I have been in a saddle," he said enthusiastically.

"And now if we were but following the pack!"

Somehow he caught at that little word "we," and his pulse bounded in rhythm to the music of her laugh.

"Well, to-day isn't the end of the world," he replied, glancing at her. "Perhaps we shall follow the pack some morning."

"Not soon." Her eyes were kept steadily to

the front. "We are to go to London for a year or two immediately after the wedding."

Again he glanced at her, but her gaze never wavered from the hills in front. The glow had faded from her cheeks and her lips were pressed together firmly.

"*We?* May I inquire what wedding you refer to?"

Then her gaze came back from the hills, and, slowly turning toward him, she looked full into his face for a moment, and her lips parted as though she would speak. But no sound came. Instead, she clutched the reins in her right hand and suddenly flung out her left hand toward him. The sun flashed on a solitaire diamond. She saw the red come into his cheeks, and then she touched her horse with the whip and galloped along the trail ahead of him.

He made no move, but sat watching her as she rode. An overhanging bush caught at her hair as she passed and gave more wisps to the vagrant winds, but it served only to add to her charm, and, for the first time in his life, Philip Elmore began to feel the heat of a fire that had smouldered all the years of his life beneath the debonairity bequeathed him by his father. The

blood of the Jordans suddenly came into its own and began ruling where it had so long been ruled. His horse stretched its neck, and feeling no restraining rein, broke into a gallop to join its mate. Tennys reined her mount down to a walk as he rode up beside her.

"I thought you were going to abandon me in these wilds," she said, a bit nervously.

"Oh, no. I do not propose to abandon you," he replied, and his tone was calm and even. "I have been wrestling with memory, and as soon as I conquered, it led me up to you once more."

Her eyes sought his face for just the briefest moment. Then she fingered her rings nervously again.

"Let's see. When we studied grammar and composition, the books classed that manner of speech as —"

"But we are not studying books this morning. We are scrutinizing human lives."

"Are we? Pardon me. I didn't know it."

Her words were rather aimless, and there was in her manner something that bespoke an effort to avoid a crisis that she felt helpless to really escape.

"Yes; I have conquered memory and linked it with a newspaper paragraph and a solitaire

ring. The society editor was right, then, after all, regarding the betrothal of Miss Tennyson Gray and Mr. Joseph Van Styne!"

She turned again and found his gaze fixed steadily on her face, and her eyes once more sought the mountain peaks ahead of her.

"Yes," she said, in a tone so low that he scarcely could hear her. "That is the truth."

They rode slowly now, for here the trail was rough, and for a time they spoke no word, but again and again Phil found himself studying the half-averted face of the girl and admiring the grace with which she sat her horse, and again and again would come a mental picture inspired by her words, "If we were but following the pack!" What a glorious thing life would be if he could ride always by her side! He would do something in the world — yes. He had heard his father's failing recited so often that he had no desire to lead a life of indolence. He wanted to accomplish things, and with her for an inspiration it would be easy, or, at least, there would be pleasure in the trying. But occasionally they could ride together. Why not? All men had their recreations — that is, almost all men. Perhaps such men as "Grab-All" Gray and Joseph Van

Styne did not, but the world curled its lip at them even while kotowing to their power. Recreation was not a sign of indolence and lack of interest in the advancement of the world's interests. Some chose motoring, some cruised in luxurious yachts — but if his passion was for the saddle and the cry of the hounds, was it shameful for him to long to indulge it occasionally? And she? He nodded as he saw her patting her horse's neck and heard her speaking to the animal after the manner of those who love a thoroughbred. She fitted so well into the picture he had drawn that he had no doubt as to her choice between motoring, yachting, or the saddle.

"Had we not better turn back?" she asked, finally. "They may miss us and set the dogs after us, thinking we are escaping."

"Not just yet. The dogs cannot follow these horses. Besides, I heard a cow-bell just now, and it gives me a thirst for some fresh milk. Perhaps there is a house close by."

They spoke to their horses and rode on at a canter. Rounding a turn in the trail, they saw before them a cabin on the mountain side, and just coming from the cow lot was a girl.

"Why, it's Nell!" Tennys was first to

recognize her, and fluttered her handkerchief toward her.

"Sure enough — but evidently she has never learned the Chautauqua salute," he said, noting that no reply came in response to the signal.

When Phil dismounted and turned to assist Tennys, he found that young lady already on her feet.

"I'm something of a hoiden, I suppose," she said, "for not permitting myself to be assisted — but you said the Ozark lexicon lacked a certain word."

They threw their bridle reins over a convenient limb, and walked to the house, where Mother Belden was awaiting them in the doorway, a frown on her face, and her eyes noting every detail of their appearance.

"We saw Nell coming from the cow lot, and stopped to beg a drink of fresh milk."

"Well, I reckon you might as well a-stayed on your horses, Mister. We ain't feedin' no beggars."

Mother Belden's tone was frigid, and the lines about her mouth were clearly drawn.

"I didn't mean that we wanted it free; we'll pay for the milk."

"Reckon we ain't got no milk to spare.

Nell!" she called to the girl, "take the milk into the house."

"You-all are ridin' round right early," said Nell.

"Just a before-breakfast canter. We will —"

"God! Listen, Nell!" cried Mother Belden.

Across the mountains came the dolorous notes of a hunting-horn, the notes now long, now short, then long again, and dying away in a peculiarly weird wail. Phil and Tennys stood watching the Beldens in astonishment, for both had grown deathly pale, and the mother had clasped her hands tightly before her. Then, as the distant horn repeated the peculiar notes, her faded eyes blazed, and one arm was raised slowly above her head and stretched toward the strangers, her bony fingers working convulsively.

"It's the signal!" she shrieked. "It's the signal that revenuers have come back to the hills! I 'spicioned you snakes! The curses o' hell on you!"

She whirled, and would have darted back into the cabin, but Nell set down the milk bucket and threw her arms about her.

"Wait a minute, Ma! Wait a minute! Maybe it's a mistake!"

"Let go o' me, Nell!" And the woman struggled to break the girl's clutch. "It ain't no mistake. I dreamt o' your pa last night, an' he was tryin' to tell me somethin'. I knowed somethin' was a-hoverin' over us! An' there's the signal!"

As she spoke, another horn sounded, but it was in a different direction, and much closer, and even before its notes had died away, another and another were heard, each in a different quarter, but all sounding the same weird signal.

Tennys looked at Phil, and as a sudden light dawned in his mind, he burst out laughing.

"Don't worry yourselves. It's all because of us that those horns are tooting. They like us so well at Le Foure's that they threatened to sound the revenue officer signal if we tried to leave. We came for a little ride before they were up, and now they're trying to have us caught. We'll ride back to the charming place, and peace will reign once more. Come on, Miss Gray."

Still laughing, the two turned toward the horses as the woman disappeared into the house, followed by Nell.

"Mr. Elmore, tell me the truth. Isn't the situation a trifle dangerous?" asked Tennys.

"Well, we had better hurry and report. These mountaineers have a habit of shooting first and talking afterward. I never dreamed of this."

"Halt, there!"

Looking around, they saw Mother Belden step out of the door and bring a Winchester to her shoulder. In an instant Phil had sprung in front of his companion.

"Don't shoot, you fool!" he cried. "It's a mistake!"

"If you move a step, I'll kill you!" shouted the woman.

"Wait, Ma, wait!" called Nell. "Yonder comes Lem!"

They looked in the direction she was pointing, and saw a man coming along the mountain. He was running, but had the appearance of one almost exhausted. In his hand he carried a revolver. Evidently he comprehended the meaning of the scene before him, for he placed his hand to his mouth as a trumpet and shouted:

"Don't shoot, Mother!"

The woman hesitated, and then lowered the rifle, which she still held cocked, however.

"We'll wait for Lem," she rasped, "but don't you budge."

Lem came running up to the group.

"Revenuers in the hills!" he panted. "Wait, damn it!" He seized the rifle barrel as Mother Belden threw the weapon to her shoulder.

"Let me be," she snarled. "With my hand in Zeb's blood I swore to get revenge!"

"Yes, I know it. But these ain't them! These belong at Le Foure's."

"Well, that's a snake den!"

"Maybe it is," said Lem, "but there ain't more'n one gov'ment spy over there!"

He glanced toward Nell as he spoke. The girl stood near her mother, and at his words she flushed a burning red, and then grew pale again.

"Is any one over there a spy, Lem?" she asked, her eyes searching his face.

The mountaineer shifted his feet uneasily, and wiped the perspiration from his brow before replying.

"I ain't sayin' that there is," he jerked. "But I'm sayin' that if there is, there ain't more'n one. But there's plenty in the hills."

"No, no, Lem. That signal was meant to effect our death or capture. We left without permission, and you know—"

"Yes, I know all about it. An' I know that the revenuers are in the hills, too. Hell, man, ain't I been dodgin' 'em an' tryin' for an hour to git here?"

A cry of dismay escaped Tennys's lips, and Phil looked grave. If revenue officers were in the hills, they were in a decidedly delicate situation. Their detention at the Le Foure place had been nothing more than a rather exciting lark up to the present, but if Lem's declarations were true, Tragedy was about to place its bloody hand on the mountains, and serious complications were apt to be the portion of Mr. Philip Elmore and Miss Tennyson Gray before they were at the end of their troubles. He glanced at his companion, and trouble shone in his eyes. She caught the look.

"Whatever you think is best," she said.

"We must get back to Le Foure's," was his decision. "Lem, if you will vouch for us here, we will go."

"I'll vouch for you, all right, but I thought you'd stay here."

"No, we can't do that. You know we are in the hills against our wish, and now you can't expect me to fight the revenue men."

"But you're likely to jine 'em an' fight us!"

said Mother Belden, fingering her rifle nervously, and turning her blazing eyes on Phil.

"No, he won't, Mother," responded Lem. "He ain't goin' to take no part in this, an' he ain't got no call to. But look here, Mister," and he faced Phil, "I'm thinkin' you can't git through to Le Foure's. The revenuers are over in Bell Spring Gulch, damn 'em!"

"Lem," said Nell, "ain't there a heap o' time bein' wasted in this talk? The signals have stopped, an' I reckon the boys are scootin' for the meetin' place."

"Sure, you're right. I'm goin' right now. I hate to leave you here, but I reckon even a revenuer won't hurt a woman."

"We'll take care of ourselves, Lem," said Mother Belden, grimly, "an' maybe I'll git a chance to do somethin' for poor Zeb."

Phil touched Tennys on the arm, and they ran to the horses. Quickly helping her to mount, he sprang into the saddle, and then waved his hand toward the group in front of the cabin.

A moment later their horses were pounding down the trail at a full gallop.

CHAPTER XIV

HORSE AGAINST HORSE

AS they dashed around the bend in the trail, both swept backward glances toward the cabin. Mother Belden was not in sight, but Lem was running in a crouching attitude up the mountain in the rear of the cabin, and Nell was standing watching him. Then the wild-rose bushes hid them from view, and both riders turned their attention to the trail before them, for here the rock cropped out and made a gallop dangerous.

Phil was riding slightly in the rear of Tennys, and twice his horse stumbled because the young man kept his eyes on the fair rider instead of on the trail. In his mind he was questioning whether he had rightly chosen in making this dash for Le Foure's. He believed that they were riding into danger — and yet he could not but feel that greater perils lay behind them. Presently the girl reined in her mount and slowed the pace to a jog-trot.

"I'm rather averse to a broken neck," she

said, "and this trail seems especially arranged for such incidents."

She turned and smiled back over her shoulder as she spoke.

"Old Israel Putnam's stunt was a merry-go-round ride compared to this," he replied, lightly.

But the moment the pace slacked so he dared, he turned his gaze anxiously to the hills that frowned down on them, and carefully he scanned every ravine, every bush, every place that might conceal a rifleman.

"You are looking for the enemy?" There was a question in her tone.

"Yes," he answered, still scanning the rocks and crags. "I confess I am a bit uneasy."

She was silent for a moment.

"By the way," she said slowly, "which side is the enemy?"

"That's a knotty problem. We certainly cannot call the moonshiners our friends. And —" He paused.

"And —"

She faced him, and he shifted in his saddle uneasily.

"And I am not certain that it will be well for us to be taken by these revenue officers."

"We could explain that we were here as prisoners."

She spoke after the manner of one who was seeking to draw another out rather than to convince with an argument.

"But — might it not prove — awkward?"

A tiny red spot burned in her cheek, and she bent low over her horse as though to adjust the bridle rein. He saw and understood.

"Please pardon me. I —"

"Hush!" She raised her head. "You have no cause to apologize. I drew it from you — purposely. This is not a pink-tea affair, but a question of life or death — or more."

The red still burned in her cheeks, but her head no longer dropped. Instead, the poise was one of pride and dignity, and she looked into his eyes unwaveringly. He nodded.

"Thank you for understanding," he said.

"I think I understand, and I agree that to be taken by the government men probably would prove awkward. It would be difficult for them to understand how prisoners could be enjoying a morning ride as we have. It would mean suspicion — and — disgrace for me."

As her voice faltered, Phil turned his gaze from her and apparently studied the hills, but

it is doubtful if he would have seen any one had they been in plain view. He was seeing only the face of the girl, ruddy with a full knowledge of the situation's delicacy, but brave and calm in spite of it. A glow came to his own face, but it was a flood from his heart that caused his pulse to quicken. She was glorious, this girl who had nestled always in the arms of luxury! He turned toward her, a passionate speech on his tongue, but the sunlight flashed on a solitaire diamond, and the words died on his lips.

A profound silence was brooding over the hills, and the ring of the horses' shoes against the rocks sounded loudly. The early breeze had died away, and now the leaves of the scrub oaks hung limp and motionless. The riders were ascending a sharp grade, and the horses were breathing heavily. Once at the top, they drew rein and rested their mounts, for beyond them the trail sloped gradually downward, though with many turns, and within the next mile lay their greatest danger. It were well to have the horses fit for a dash when they should again ride onward. On one side the mountain rose precipitously, being covered with stunted oaks and with great boulders

and ledges of rock. On the other side was a ravine.

"What do you think of the situation?" asked the girl, rather anxiously.

"I do not like this silence," he answered. "Somehow, it seems oppressive. I'd rather hear a rifle-shot, I believe."

She patted the neck of her horse, but made no answer. It seemed to him that at every movement of her hand that diamond mocked him with its gleaming, and he found himself scowling at the hand. He hated that ring — just as he knew he would hate Joe Van Styne the moment he should see him. Then for a moment he tried to imagine how Mr. Van Styne would deport himself were he here in the mountain wilderness with all the perplexities of the present situation crowding upon him.

A sudden crash in the underbrush high up on the mountain side at their left startled them.

"Look out!" he cried, and lashed the girl's horse with his riding whip as he spoke.

His heels gouged sharply into the flanks of his own mount, and both horses sprang forward barely in time to avoid being struck by a

huge mass of rock that had become dislodged and plunged down the mountain. As it struck the spot where Tennys's horse had stood, the rock bounded over the side of the trail and went crashing down through the scrub oaks into the bottom of the ravine below.

The girl turned a blanched face toward him.

"Did that rock start itself?" she asked.

"Impossible." He was trying to pierce the thicket above with his gaze. "But it probably was accidental. It came from that clump of bushes up there, and I'll wager that there's a man flattened out on the ground beyond."

"Then let's ride for it."

"Wait. Give the horses every possible moment. We'll need all of their endurance soon, perhaps. That fellow up there has been watching us. It won't do us any harm to be looked at a little longer."

She settled herself more firmly in the saddle, and turned her face toward the ravine, as though the plunging boulder had not aroused in her mind any special interest. Phil noted that the horses were no longer panting, and he, too, made ready for the coming ride, and even as he slipped his feet into the stirrups, two rifle-

shots fired in quick succession rang out, the echoes being hurled back and forth from ridge to ridge in a manner that baffled and left the hearers uncertain as to the direction of the firing. Tennys glanced at him, and he nodded.

"At a gallop," he said tersely. "Save the speed."

As they rode away he turned in his saddle and scanned the bushes, and a grim smile hovered for an instant about his lips as he saw a man's head, hatless, cautiously raised above the tangle, and a pair of eyes looked into his own. But no word came from the spy in the covert, and there was no sign of a weapon, so Phil turned his back to the spot and gave his attention to the panorama unrolling before them. The trail led rapidly down into the valley, and at every spring of the horses the depth of the ravine on their right grew less, and the ravine itself widened into a valley. They were riding at an easy gallop, and the man's study of the horses told him the pleasing fact that they were fit for a dash should it be necessary. He kept his mount a length in the rear of the girl, and this made conversation impossible.

He was wondering why it was they did not meet Daniel or some of the searchers from Le Foure's, for he had no doubt that the signal had first been sounded because of their disappearance from the place. He could not fathom the mystery of the signal and the appearance of the revenue men at the same time, but rightly set it down as a coincidence. He had fully expected to meet Daniel and Le Foure and perhaps some of the others, who, doubtless, had cabins near by, but could not understand their failure to appear, unless they had taken the other road and had begun the pursuit down the trail up which he and Tennys had been taken as prisoners. That was the only explanation, unless — a sudden thought caused him to speak softly to his horse and ride closer to Tennys's side — unless those rifle-shots had come from ahead and had been fired at the La Foure party, resulting in their being turned back. In that case he and Tennys Gray were close to the crisis!

The road now was but a few feet higher than the valley into which it was rapidly dipping, and as soon as they rounded the next turn, Bell Spring Gulch would be revealed to them. Safely past that point in the trail, he believed

the danger of a meeting with the government officers would be but slight, for Lem had said that they were coming down this gulch. Ahead, the road turned abruptly around a bold headland, and Phil swung his horse as close to the outer edge of the trail as the animal could travel, and leaned far over in the saddle to catch the first possible glimpse of the valley ahead.

A sharp cry from Tennys instantly brought him upright in the saddle again just as they rounded the turn, and he saw a man standing in the trail before them, a rifle in his hands.

"Halt!" came the crisp command, almost as an echo of the girl's voice.

The turn in the road was so sharp that the two were within fifteen feet of the man before the discovery and the command. As the word came, the rifle leaped to the man's shoulder, and Tennys drew rein so suddenly that her mount reared almost erect, and a less accomplished rider would have been unseated. This much Phil Elmore saw with one sweeping glance, but his decision came like a flash of lightning, and as the rifle was going to the shoulder he gave a sharp cry of encouragement to his horse and the lash of his whip scourged the animal's flanks. With a snort of pain, the

horse bounded forward past its rearing mate, there was a flash of flame from the rifle, but the shot was hasty and went wild, and before the man could recover and spring aside, Phil's horse struck him like an avalanche and he was sent tumbling over the side of the road.

"Splendidly done!" cried the girl.

He reined in slightly, and looked back. She had settled her mount now and in a moment she was beside him, and there was that in her eyes that set his heart to dancing once more.

"It was that or — God! Look yonder!"

He had faced to the front again, and far away to the right oblique he saw half a dozen horsemen coming out of Bell Spring Gulch. Tennys saw them as he waved his hand, and a quick cluck sent her horse thundering forward at increased speed, and, close behind, the man rode, his teeth clenched, and his eyes trying to measure the distances.

"It's horse against horse, now!" he called.

The trail they were following and the Bell Spring trail formed the forks of an immense "Y," with the valley between so broken and strewn with boulders that it was impossible to take any short cuts. Both parties were riding

toward the stem of the "Y," and the fate of the man and the girl depended on who reached the forks first. The shot had attracted the attention of the strangers, and as they saw the couple dashing straight ahead, they put spurs to their own mounts, and the race began. Phil calculated the angles.

"Faster!" he shouted, and he saw the girl bend low over her horse as though speaking words of encouragement.

Both animals responded, and now they were fairly flying along the rough road. Rocks were strewn thickly along the trail, and here and there heavy rains had washed deep gullies across their way, but there could be no slacking of the pace. A quick eye, a cool head, and the sure feet of their mounts must be trusted. The girl's hair had become loosened, and soon it was tumbling about her face or waving behind her like finely spun silk.

"By George, the picture's worth it all!" he muttered, his eyes on her in reckless disregard of the rocks and washouts.

How she rode! Leaning well forward, she gave herself easily to every spring of the horse, her left hand firmly grasping the reins, while with her right she would frequently pat the

glossy neck of the horse, which was now wet with sweat. Her skirt was tucked close, so that as little resistance as possible was offered, while from beneath the skirt peeped a slender ankle and a dainty foot that never lost the slippered stirrup.

Across the rapidly narrowing angle came shouts, and they saw one who rode well in advance raise his hand as though in command, and they had no doubt that he was demanding their surrender. The girl looked back over her shoulder.

"We're going to beat them!" she cried.

Phil thought so, too, and nodded encouragingly. But while he believed they would reach the forks of the road with a good lead, he was now beginning to wonder what it would profit them. But a short distance beyond was Le Foure's. Beyond that place they could not hope to continue the ride, and it was probable that the pursuit would not be relinquished. Now the forks were near at hand, and the pursuers were losing. However, the angle had brought them so close together that a shout could be heard, and the leader, waving his hand until he saw that the two were watching him, threw back his coat and pointed to a

badge that glistened in the sunlight. Then he placed one hand to his mouth as a trumpet.

"In the name of the law!" he bellowed.

"No, no, no!" cried Tennys, looking anxiously back at Phil. "We mustn't be taken. We can beat them."

"But if they shoot?"

"They can't hit us as long as they ride like that. I'll take the chance!"

"Then give the whip!" he replied.

Simultaneously both lashes fell, and the horses answered. This action was sufficient reply to the command hurled across the angle, and the leader raised his rifle from where it had been lying across his knees and fired. But accurate shooting was impossible under the circumstances, and they did not even hear the bullet whistle. Another of them fired, and a geyser of dust in the road ahead showed where the ball had struck. Perhaps neither was intended to do harm.

"I can't have you take the risk! We'd better give in!"

For answer, her riding whip rose and fell twice, and when she glanced back at him there was a smile on her lips, though her face was pale. Then they thundered past the forks and

BOTH LASHES FELL, AND THE HORSES ANSWERED. — *Page 264.*

went pounding down the stem of the "Y" with a hundred yards' lead.

"We'll win!" Her voice rang exultantly.

Crack! Crack! Enraged at the refusal to surrender, the pursuers were firing again, and both heard the deadly whine of the bullets as they passed. The leader reached the intersection and came flying along in the rear. Phil turned in the saddle just in time to see the rifle again spurt flame. A wild scream of pain came from the girl's horse, and only the skill of the rider kept the beast from plunging to its knees.

"He's hit!" she cried.

However, the sting of the bullet seemed to goad the animal to renewed exertions, and, recovering itself after the first wavering, it thundered on with greater speed. But Phil saw it suddenly stagger, and he realized that it would drop in a moment. Lashing his own horse, he dashed forward, galloped alongside the staggering, dying animal, and then, leaning toward the girl, he clasped her about the waist.

"Let go! Quick!" he commanded.

She obeyed, and he swept her from the saddle just as her horse plunged forward into

the dust. His own mount swerved slightly as the added weight dragged it to one side, but the man swung the girl quickly to the saddle in front of him, where she crouched, clutching the horse's mane, and with Phil's arm holding her steady.

For an instant she looked up into his eyes, but she spoke no word, and the man, too, was silent. Perhaps the arm that supported her drew a trifle closer than was necessary, but it was only momentarily. Mercilessly he lashed the horse, and nobly the animal responded to the goad, but only for a short time. The double burden was too much for the tired beast, and its pace slackened. No more firing came, but when Phil looked back he saw that the leader had shortened the gap. Phil lifted himself back over the saddle cantle.

"Take the saddle — astride — quick!" he whispered.

A wave of red stole the pallor from her cheeks, but she obeyed. The man's arm still held her, and suddenly she found herself drawn to him in a close embrace, and his lips touched hers.

"Forgive me!" he whispered. "Give him the whip! I'll try to stop these fellows!"

"No, no!" she screamed, as she felt him slipping from the horse. "You must not do that, Phil!"

But he had already sprung to the ground, and turned to face the oncoming horsemen.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE HANDS OF THE LAW

ELMORE'S action was a startling surprise to the revenue officer who was riding well in advance of his men, and he evidently interpreted it as an intention to fight, for he threw his horse almost to its haunches in stopping, and then the rifle went to his shoulder.

"Hands up!" he shouted. "Don't try to draw a gun, or I'll drop you!"

Phil was about to obey, when he heard footsteps behind him, and he turned to see the girl in gray running up the trail toward him. In the distance the riderless horse was galloping away toward home.

"Tennys! Why did you do this?" For the moment the levelled rifle was ignored.

"Because — because — Oh, you mustn't ask me, Phil!" She ran to his side, and laid one hand on his arm confidingly.

"Come, put your hands up!" came the gruff order.

Phil faced the officer, and there was something in his heart that sent a laugh to his lips.

"Don't be a fool, my friend," he responded. "Do you suppose I'd be standing here like this if I had a gun?"

The other men had come up now, and together they rode slowly toward the two who stood side by side in the trail awaiting them.

"Tennys," said Phil, softly, "you are glorious!"

Then they were surrounded by the horsemen, stern-looking fellows, each of whom held a Winchester. The leader bore marks of intelligence and gentility, but the others were samples of the dare-devil riffraff that can always be hired to engage in hazardous undertakings and that frequently consider loot as part of their remuneration.

"Charming race we had, wasn't it?" suggested Elmore, nodding to the leader.

"Have you a gun?" was the terse query.

"No — or you might be horseless yourself."

"Search him, Bill."

A red-faced fellow sprang from his horse and felt around Phil's pockets and down into his shoe tops. Then he spat out a mouthful of tobacco juice and turned toward Tennys.

"Reckon I'd better search the girl, too, Cap," he grinned, and laid his hand on her.

Barely had his fingers touched her clothing when a clenched fist shot out and he went down in a heap.

"You cur!" grated Phil. "If you touch her again, I'll kill you!"

There was a sudden shifting of rifles, but the captain sprang to the ground and jerked out his revolver.

"None of that!" he growled, facing his men. "Bill got what he deserved. What's your name?" he asked, turning to the prisoners.

"Tennys—" began the girl, impulsively, but stopped as she caught a warning look from her companion.

"What did you say?" demanded the officer. "We're government men."

"Yes, we know it," said Phil.

"Ha! That's just the confession I wanted. How did you know it?"

"I suppose your theory is that because we know you are revenue men we must be moonshiners. Otherwise, we could not have the information."

"Revenuers? Moonshiners?" There was

a look of surprise on the leader's face. "Say, you're not little nor dark-skinned, are you?"

"That's a queer question. Am I to be entered in a beauty contest?"

The officer chuckled.

"You don't lose your nerve very easy." He studied Phil's appearance a moment. "But you said something about moonshiners," he added. "That was guessing pretty straight."

"Well, my sleuth, you are mistaken. And while you are wasting time here with us your game is covering up its lair and outwitting you."

"How so?"

"Because every man in the hills knows you fellows are here."

"And you are responsible for the warning, I doubt not?"

"I'll use your own words, and say that you are 'guessing pretty straight.'"

"Then you'll go to prison, my buck. But I don't see how you did it."

"I didn't do it."

The officer stared at first one and then the other of the two, and when he saw a faint twinkle in the girl's eyes, his wrath exploded.

"Look here!" he bellowed. "I've had

enough of this side-stepping. First you say you did do it, and then that you didn't. Now — "

"I only said I was responsible," interrupted Phil, "not that I did it. Perhaps you heard horns some time ago — "

"Yes, a fox-chase, I suppose. What of it?"

"Nothing — except that the foxes were blowing the horns themselves. Those horns were signalling that revenuers were in the hills."

The men exchanged glances, and then they turned uneasily in their saddles and scanned the hills and the rocks. They were fully aware of the moonshiner's fondness for bushwhacking.

"And what had you to do with it?" demanded the captain.

"The horns were sounded in order to catch us. We are the supposed revenuers."

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"Possibly. It isn't my fault, though."

"But this is pretty badly tangled. I'd like to know who you are."

"Captain, I'm a law-abiding citizen, and I warn you again that every moment you spend parleying with us gives your game that much advantage."

"Then tell me the truth."

"I am telling it, the plain truth."

"But I don't understand."

"And you're not likely to. Everything I have told you is true, and I've warned you. I have nothing more to say."

"Who are you?"

"I refuse to answer."

"You knew we were government officers, and refused to halt."

"Yes. We didn't want to be bothered by you."

At that moment the long-drawn notes of a hunting-horn were again heard. When the horn was silenced, the leader turned once more to Phil.

"What was that signal?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, but I imagine it concerns you."

The captain kicked a stone viciously, and then stood for a moment in deep study, perplexity in every line of his face.

"You will not tell me who you are?"

"No."

"You are not mountaineers."

"Hardly."

"What are you doing here?"

"It would be difficult to explain."

There was another interval of silence, and the captain took off his hat and scratched his head meditatively. . . . Clearly, he was at a loss to know what to do with the couple he had striven so hard to catch. When he looked up, a scowl was on his face. He pulled out his watch.

"I'm going to give you three minutes to tell us what the signal was. If you don't— a halter rope over a limb for you. I believe you are mixed up in this business."

There was a gasp of dismay from the girl, and she would have spoken, but Phil gave her another warning glance, and she remained silent.

"One minute gone! What do you say?"

The leader's tone was grim enough, but Phil caught his eye, and thought he saw uncertainty and irresolution there.

"I say you're a fool for giving those fellows so much time. You'll never catch them now."

"Then we'll hang you!"

Mr. Philip Elmore was by nature a very debonair young man, but to be surrounded by several tough-looking men in a mountain wilderness and be informed that you will be hanged if you do not do a certain thing,

which thing you are totally unable to do, even if you wish, is not calculated to be mirth-provoking, and it would be untrue to deny that he felt a few chills dart up and down his spinal cord. But the irresolution in the captain's eyes gave him the belief that the other was indulging in a strong bluff, so he resolved on a bit of the same strategy.

"Oh, no, Captain, you'll not do that," he replied, forcing a light laugh, which, however, was more like the rattling of dry husks than real mirth. "You don't really believe anything of the kind about me. All the ropes in Arkansas couldn't make me tell the meaning of that signal, because I don't know."

"Cap'n, can I talk a minute?" asked a sharp-featured fellow, urging his horse forward. And then, without waiting for a reply, he added: "I reckon maybe I can give a clew to this mystery. What did you say your name is?" He looked at Tennys.

"I don't think I said," she replied, but she grew a shade paler at his words and manner.

"Well, you started to, an' it was a whole lot like a name I saw in a paper yesterday, an' you look a thunderin' lot like the picture, too."

There was a sound in the girl's throat, and Phil felt her quick clutch on his arm.

"My name — and picture — in a paper?" she gasped. "It — it must be a lie!"

"If you are bound to arrest us, do so!" exclaimed Phil, "but don't listen to such magpie lies as that."

"Magpie lies, is it?" retorted the man. "Look at her tremblin', Cap'n, if you think I'm lyin'."

Instantly Tennys dropped her hand from the arm she had clung to, and stood before them, calm and apparently as unemotional as stone, but there was a pallor in her face that could not be hidden. The leader looked at her, and then turned to his follower.

"What's the story, Jake?" he asked.

"It was about some rich man's daughter — let's see, he lived in St. Louis — no, New York — maybe it was Chicago — or Boston — but she had mysteriously disappeared somewheres down here, an' her father was offerin' five thousand dollars reward for information about her."

"Um-m! Five thousand, eh?" The captain's eyes shone with greed.

"The fellow's lying to you, Captain," asserted Phil, boldly. "He's afraid to mix it up with

these hill men, and is making up a wild story to delay you."

"That so?" replied the fellow. "I stuck that paper down in my pocket some place." He fumbled about in his coat, and then drew out a crumpled-up portion of a newspaper. "Reckon this will tell whether I'm lyin' or not."

Tennys looked at Elmore, but that young man had no encouraging look to return. He was at his wit's end. It would be typical of "Grab-All" Gray to put his trust in money in trying to find some trace of his missing daughter. He would not have the delicacy to see that such a course might subject her to many indignities and embarrassments that could be avoided by the employment of a few discreet detectives. It was quite probable, therefore, that the deputy had seen Tennys's name and picture, and if he chanced to have that paper with him — The possibilities brought the perspiration out on the young man's face. He could foresee the scandal that would ensue should these officers drag them out of the mountains together.

The girl stood cold and silent, and he watched the man slowly unfold the paper and look it over carefully, and then turn it over and

closely inspect the other side of the sheet. Should the deputy find the picture and the story of the missing girl, Phil had determined to snatch the paper and tear it up before they could prevent. A look of annoyance came over the revenue man's face, and, muttering something, he again began going through his pockets.

"Cuss the luck!" he exclaimed. "I've stuffed the wrong piece o' that paper in my pocket."

"Why, certainly," taunted Phil, while a flood of relief swept over him. "You put your Sunday-school leaflet in your pocket instead of the paper with a heavy reward for a missing girl."

The captain still stood perplexed, uncertain what to do with his prisoners. That his deputy's words had impressed him, was evident by the way in which he watched the girl. But if he hoped for any sign from her he was disappointed, for she might have been a figure carved from an arctic glacier for all the expression her face bore. The man with the paper sprang from his horse and spoke in a low tone to the leader. Phil could catch but a word here and there, ". . . reward . . . I'll swear to . . . rich . . . beats other." The captain nodded and turned to the captives.

"I'm going to take you with me," he said. "Maybe I can find out something about you two after we get out of the mountains. You refuse to explain anything, and it looks shady to me."

A wave of red suffused the girl's cheeks at the rough words, and, with a quick spring forward, she raised her riding whip to lash the face of the officer, but Phil caught the descending hand and gently took the whip from her.

"Don't," he said, in a low tone. "It isn't best."

"By thunder, I like a game one!" exclaimed the leader. "I'll take the whips, though," he added, and then tossed them over among the rocks.

Tennys turned her back to him and stood looking down the valley, her hands clasped idly in front of her. The captain still held his watch open in his hand, but now he snapped it shut.

"We're losing valuable time," he said, "though I don't know that we can do anything more than make targets of ourselves. I've got nothing to work from but a faulty map." He turned toward the fellow whom Phil had knocked down. "Bill, these two are to be your prisoners until we return. Take them to —"

He paused and looked the man steadily in the eyes, and the look of hate and malevolence he saw there was unmistakable. The captain shook his head. "No," he said, "I think Jake had better do the guarding. I want to find them alive."

"Name the place, Cap'n," spoke up Jake.

"The cabin where we were at daybreak."

"Ain't cabins dangerous?"

"Huh! Not to-day. Every devil in the hills is away from home. Wait there. If we ain't back by sundown — well, we won't be back. Then you'd better strike for the railroad, and tell 'em to send a company of soldiers in here."

The others mounted and moved off up the trail over which they had recently ridden in pursuit of Phil and the girl. Then Jake turned to his charges.

"We'd better be a moseyin'," he said. "The girl can ride."

Phil gave her his hand, and she sprang into the saddle.

"If I ever get out of these awful mountains, I believe I'll be lonesome if I'm not under guard by some one."

She looked down at Phil and laughed merrily, and he promptly forgot his doubts and fears, and

laughed also. Jake hitched his six-shooter to a more convenient position, and then dropped his Winchester into the hollow of his arm.

"You lead the horse, Mister, an' I'll stroll along right close behind and tell you the road."

They followed the course the others had taken until they reached the forks of the road, and then Jake answered Phil's look by waving his hand toward the Bell Spring trail. Far up the other trail the captain and his deputies were just rounding the turn, and as the trio moved slowly across the narrow valley the others disappeared, a dust-cloud rising above the hill showing their progress. Phil expected each moment to hear a rifle volley, but the hill men had not forgotten the lesson of years before, and this day there was to be no fighting unless the government's men cornered them, which was most unlikely. As for the stills, experience had also proved very valuable in that respect, and the time wasted by the officers in chasing the two had been sufficient for a complete obliteration of all signs of such interesting places. But as the officer and his deputies rode so blithely along the mountain trail that morning without seeing a sign of human life, more than

one pair of eyes watched their progress. The trio plodding along the Bell Spring trail were also noted from distant peaks and ridges, and the hurried consultations could bring forth no satisfactory explanation of the mystery of it. In the meantime the three crossed the vale and made their way along the trail, which grew rougher in the other gulch.

"In my old school geography was a picture, 'Crossing the Andes,' of which I am reminded by this interesting journey," said Tennys. "I remember how awkward the girl looked perched upon a mule which was being led along a cliff. I feel very much as she looked."

"You look very comfortable," observed Phil, with rather more enthusiasm than the occasion demanded.

"Well, this saddle wasn't bought for me, you know. Still, I would be quite comfortable if I only knew what to do with my hands. I'm not accustomed to having my horse led for me like the 'lit-tle lady' in the circus while the ring-master announces the next daring act."

"Your imagination is lively. From the Andes to a circus is something of a gap."

"And during the journey from the one to the other I forget the very sombre present. Let

your own imagination do acrobatics; it may afford some pleasure, Mr. Elmore."

He glanced back at Jake. That gaunt gentleman was plodding along a short distance in the rear, just far enough to be out of earshot of words not too loudly spoken.

"Straight ahead," called Jake, misinterpreting that backward look.

If the man holding the bridle heard the words, he ignored them. He was looking up at the girl.

"You called me Phil a while ago," he said.

The color in her cheeks deepened.

"One does find it difficult to be conventional in the Ozarks." Her words had a bit of chill to them.

"How much farther do you suppose this strange journey will continue?" she asked, after an interval of silence.

"To the end of the world, I hope."

The trail was thickly strewn with rocks, and he led the horse carefully, not raising his eyes. His speech had been too bold.

"It will be terrible for us to be taken out of the mountains by these men. It savors somewhat of — of — an elopement." She laughed nervously. His remark had been ignored.

Phil's eyes were raised from the rocks, but only to look straight ahead.

"They shan't take us out!"

"But that foolish reward — and my picture."

"I don't care. I'm not going to let them drag us out and dangle us before the gaping public."

She turned in the saddle and measured Jake with her eyes. Then she turned her gaze to her companion.

"If only he did not have those weapons." She was noting the breadth of Elmore's shoulders.

"Strategy is what wins battles," he replied, catching her words.

After passing Bell Spring, the road turned sharply to the right, zigzagged its way up a rugged hillside, and then wound sinuously through a small forest of pines, beyond which was a clearing, with a small house perched seemingly on the very verge of a bluff. However, when the party approached, they found that the house set back some fifty feet from the bluff, a grassy slope lying between. This sward gave evidence of having been well-cared for once, but now rank weeds were flourishing here and there, while the honeysuckle vines clinging to the side of the cabin were sadly

tangled. The clearing in the rear of the building had once been cultivated, but now it, too, showed neglect. From the front door of the dwelling one had a view of the valley spread out below, and of the broken ridges of hills beyond. The Castle stood far away to the right, Phil knew, but it was hidden from view by the timbered peaks. A short distance away from the house was the spring, and the bushes that had once been cultivated to shade and shelter it were also snarled from inattention.

"Hop down, Miss," said Jake, dropping the butt of his rifle to the ground. Then, as Phil gave her his hand, the deputy added: "We was here this mornin' when we heard them hòrns. Hadn't any idea it was anything but a fox-chase. Every derned fool in the South is crazy over fox-chasin'!"

Tennys glanced at Phil, and the light of merriment was dancing in her eyes as she heard his favorite sport thus anathematized. But Jake was unaware of where his shafts were striking.

"Bet a hundred Cap'n an' the boys won't sight a soul," he continued, glumly. "This expedition was started off half-cocked, anyway. Just tie the horse to that tree, yonder, an' then we'll take a look inside the place."

After securing the horse, the two men entered the cabin, a dwelling of two rooms. In one room was a small cook-stove, a rough dining table, and a cupboard in which were a few dishes and cooking utensils. The other apartment was a bedroom.

"Just as we left it this mornin'," said Jake. "There's some bacon an' other eatables there in the cupboard, so we can have a few bites at noon. Can you cook?" He turned to Tennys.

"Why — why — certainly I can cook." She turned her back to the deputy. "I always have to get up and get breakfast before my — brother — goes to work."

Jake looked at her sharply.

"Humph! Get breakfast for your brother!" He grinned sarcastically. "This the brother?" He jerked his thumb toward Phil.

"No matter. You shall have your bacon at noon."

Phil had turned away to hide the smile that was struggling to find a place on his lips. Several pictures hung on the walls, all of them cut from newspapers — all but one, that is, for he had caught sight of a photograph half-hidden in a wreath of withered flowers. Reaching

up, he took it down, and an exclamation came to his lips as he did so. Jake turned and looked over his shoulder.

"Blamed if it ain't *her* picture, ain't it?" he exclaimed.

Phil made no reply, but handed the photograph to Tennys. The picture bore the name of a New York artist. She studied it carefully a moment.

"She is dead," she said softly.

Phil looked at her inquiringly.

"You don't mean that you are mystified?" she asked. "It's simple enough. It is Rosalie!"

"How do you know?"

"Because it resembles me considerably."

Elmore struck his hands together.

"I'm a dolt! It's clear enough now. And this is Jerry's cabin."

She nodded.

"Without doubt. He had it all ready for her."

Jake was standing listening.

"Let me in on this thing, won't you? Ain't it her picture?" nodding toward Tennys.

"No; nor is it the picture of any one that she ever saw."

"Well, I'll be —" He stopped suddenly and swallowed vigorously.

"It's the picture you probably saw in that paper," suggested Phil.

Jake reached for the photograph again and studied it carefully, occasionally raising his eyes to the girl before him. Finally he shook his head.

"No, it ain't. There's considerable difference when you come to study the two."

Elmore carefully replaced the picture, and then, in looking around the rooms, he found several books, all of them showing evidences of having been frequently handled. He remembered Le Foure's statement that Rosalie had taught her mountain lover, and he had no doubt that these were the books over which they had bent side by side, the girl teaching the mind of the man, and the man teaching the heart of the maid.

The morning dragged away, and no sign came from the hills to tell how fared the game of hide-and-seek being played by desperate men. Jake was very ill at ease, and tramped restlessly about, listening, listening, always listening for the sound of rifle-shots, but silence brooded everywhere. Phil watched the fellow narrowly, hoping to catch him off his guard, but never a moment did the deputy relax his vigi-

lance sufficiently to justify an attack. The Winchester was out of his hands but seldom, and then it was near him, and his hand rested with apparent carelessness on the six-shooter in his belt. It was one o'clock when Tennys volunteered to prove her skill as a cook.

A fire was easily built with the pine wood, and in a short time strips of bacon were sizzling in the frying-pan, while Phil brought out the dishes and arranged the table. Occasionally he would find himself chuckling as he stole glances at the girl and pictured the horror that would possess certain Chicago feminine and masculine notables could they see "Grab-All" Gray's daughter bending over a frying-pan in this lonely mountain dwelling, while an uncouth-looking figure stood in the doorway leaning on a loaded rifle.

Jake picked up a bucket.

"I'll bring some water from the spring," he said. But when he went out he did not forget to take the rifle with him.

Tennys caught one of Phil's amused glances as she rather awkwardly turned the bacon.

"What a morsel this would make, properly illustrated, for the Sunday papers," she laughed.

"And the 'Courier' is certain of the

scoop." He was exploring the recesses of the cupboard. "Looks as though we'll have to take our coffee without cream or sugar. Jerry carelessly failed to telephone the corner grocery before he left."

The bacon was sending forth an aroma that sharpened the appetite, and as Phil laid the plates and knives, he suggested that it might be well to put a few more strips into the pan. Finally it occurred to both that it was time for Jake's return. Going to the corner of the house, they looked toward the spring and saw him sprawled there flat on the ground as though drinking, but he lay motionless, and beside him was the overturned bucket.

Phil ran to him, closely followed by the girl. They found the deputy lying unconscious, a bleeding wound on the side of his head. A big rock lying beside his body bore a few spots of blood, and showed that the man had been stricken with this missile.

CHAPTER XVI

A FLASH OF FORGETFULNESS

"IS he dead?" asked Tennys, as Phil knelt beside the unconscious officer.

"Dead? No. But he received a hard thump on the head with this rock."

He turned the missile over with his foot. Then he suddenly snatched the pistol from the holster and made a dash for the thick tangle of bushes above the spring. The tall weeds and grass beyond showed plainly where some one had lain, and it was evident that, as Jake had stooped to fill the bucket, the rock had been hurled with unerring aim by whoever had been hidden behind the screen of bushes. After fully satisfying himself that the unknown had disappeared, Phil made his way back to where Tennys awaited him.

"He's gone, whoever he was," he said. "I can't understand it at all. I'll be crazier than Jerry if I don't get out of these mountains soon."

"What is to prevent our escaping? This rock-thrower has given us our chance!"

Phil nodded slowly.

"Of course. But—" He paused and knelt again by Jake and felt his pulse. "I scarcely know what to do with him. His pulse is good, and I suppose he'll come out of it pretty soon. Anyway, we've got ourselves to look out for. I think I can carry him to the cabin."

Kneeling again, he drew Jake's arms up over his shoulders, and then rising, he staggered toward the cabin, the unconscious man's feet dragging. Tennys caught up the rifle and followed. Jake was laid on the bed, and the blood was washed from the jagged scalp wound. The deputy groaned and turned partly over.

"He's coming out all right. We had better hurry. I don't like to bind him. He's an officer of the law, you know, and if the hill men catch him, I want him to be able to fight. We'll take the revolver and leave his rifle."

A dense cloud of smoke was filling the room.

"The bacon!" cried the girl, and darted to the stove. In a moment she returned with a rueful countenance. "It's burned to a cinder. No dinner for us!"

"All right. Then we'll have to go hungry."

They placed the rifle beside the bed and hurried from the house.

"Where's the horse?"

Phil stopped and looked around. The animal was gone. A portion of the bridle rein was dangling from the tree where the horse had been tied, and an examination showed that the strap had been cut with a knife.

"Our deliverer has left us to foot it," he said.

Scarcely had the words been uttered, when the report of a rifle came echoing across the hills, followed closely by two others. Then there was silence again.

"That firing was over in Bell Spring Gulch. We had better try to find some path down into this other valley. No matter who did the shooting, they are no friends of ours. We must dodge both sides."

They hurried along the bluff, and finally were rewarded by finding a small path that seemed to offer a way down the precipitous wall. Clasping hands, they began the rather perilous descent, Phil taking the lead and bracing himself to steady the girl, who clung to his hand and followed closely after. Once she lost her

footing on the loose stones, and with a sharp cry plunged downward, but he threw out one arm and caught her while he clung to a jagged rock with the other. The shock of her fall caused the sharp edge of the stone to cut into his fingers until they bled, but his clutch was not broken, and he slowly drew her back to a firmer footing. Then they began the descent once more.

"Let's be thankful that rock was there," he replied to her words of regret for the accident. "A tumble might mean a broken neck."

It was slow work, but at last they reached the bottom, and found grass beneath their feet.

"I don't believe they will ever suspect that we came down that bluff," said Tennys, as they paused and looked back. "I would not care to do it again, either."

Realizing that the farther out into the valley they got the easier they could be seen from the plateau above, they kept close to the foot of the bluff and took a course that led away from Bell Spring Gulch. Philip Elmore was sorely distressed in mind, for the situation was growing serious. The hills were swarming with desperate men, and to neither side did he dare appeal for help, even did he know where the

rapidly shifting forces could be found. There was only one place of refuge for them, and that was the Le Foure place — but that seemed almost as impossible to reach as if it had been suddenly transferred to another planet. An attempt to reach the Castle just now was almost certain to result in capture by some of those roaming the hills. The only solution of the problem that presented itself to his mind was to find a hiding-place until dark, and then try for Le Foure's. It was dangerous work to try to cross these mountains in the dark, but no other course seemed practicable.

"I cannot walk another step!"

Tennys suddenly stopped beneath a tree and sank down on the grass. Phil stood looking at her anxiously.

"If I knew where there was a horse, I would steal it," he said so earnestly that the girl looked up with a wan smile.

"Greater — er — friendship — hath no man than this, that he would turn horse-thief for his friend."

"Thanks for the flash of humor. You cannot be totally collapsed, else you would not joke."

"Not totally collapsed, but very tired. Do

you realize, sir, that we have not broken bread this day?"

"Yes — my realization is very poignant. Listen!"

The notes of a hunting-horn sounded again and again in plaintive crescendo, seeming to come from among the peaks across the little valley.

"If I ever get back to civilization, I'm going to petition Congress to make it a capital offence to blow a horn of any kind," he exclaimed in sudden ill-humor.

The girl's head dropped until her chin rested on her hand, and he saw her shoulders quiver slightly. Then a tear-drop splashed on to her skirt. In an instant he was kneeling beside her.

"For God's sake, Tennys, don't give way!"

His pleading rallied her failing strength.

"No, no — I mustn't, I know, but —" she quickly put her kerchief to her eyes and then looked up, the tears gone — "I just felt like giving up. I'm afraid I'm a bit of a baby, after all." She arose to her feet and threw her head back proudly. "Had we not better go on?"

He had also arisen to his feet and was standing

silent, a problem in his mind. She waited a full minute, but no word came.

"I am quite rested," she suggested.

"Perhaps we have made a mistake." His words came slowly, as though he were weighing carefully each one. "Maybe we ought to go back."

"Back? Where?"

"To Jerry's — to the officers. They can take you out of this wilderness."

He no longer looked at the ground, but his gaze would not meet hers. Instead, he stared fixedly at the distant hills.

"And make me a prey to tongue-waggers?" Her tone was crisp.

"Your father is rich. An extra thousand would silence them."

She made no reply, but, plucking a long blade of grass, she slowly tore it into small bits and then flung it from her.

"Well?" He faced her now.

"I believe that what you say is true. In fact, I had thought of it before." Another blade of grass was undergoing torture.

"And like a fool, I did not. Why did you not suggest it?"

"Because — " She hesitated, threw the grass

blade from her, and looked steadily into his eyes for a moment. Then her lids dropped. "Because I — prefer — the wilderness, Phil," she said softly.

"Tennys, you do not mean it — You are forgetting — that." He pointed to the ring that flashed on her finger.

She held up her hand and regarded it a moment.

"Yes, I *had* forgotten it. But now that I remember — "

She slipped the ring from her finger and flung it from her.

A sudden flood swept from his heart; and the trees and the hills wavered unsteadily before him, and he found his arms about Tennys Gray, and felt her breath warm his cheek as he drew her closer.

"No, no, Phil! Please — not that!"

His lips had clung to hers for a moment, and then had come her protest, low-voiced, and with a slight struggle. Again his lips knew hers; and then she broke his grasp. There was a moment in which no word was spoken, but each looked into the eyes of the other and read there a message. Slowly the girl sank to her knees.

"Oh, God!" she breathed. "Forgive! Forgive!"

With a sob she flung herself prostrate on the ground, and her scarlet face was buried in her arms. Above her stood the man, his heart dancing wildly to the passionate cry of his blood. His pulse beat heavily in the swollen veins of his wrists; his brain was a caldron of electric fire.

"*Tennys!*"

The word was but little more than a whisper. No answer, and he stood silent, until the sobs ceased.

"Tennys!"

The girl raised her head. He reached out his hand, and slowly her hand stole toward it, and at last rested there. Gently he raised her to her feet.

"It was beastly of me," he said, "but I — love you!"

The hand that still rested in his trembled, and the blood was surging in her cheeks.

"I did not mean — that is — I mean — I am a barbarian, I fear. But —" She paused.

"But you love me!" he finished.

"I — it is all so wrong!" she exclaimed. "Don't you see it is, Phil?" She withdrew her hand.

A short distance away the solitaire lying in the grass caught a ray from the afternoon sun, and iridescent flame flashed into his eyes. He picked it up and came back to her, holding it out.

"Yes, I see. Here is your ring." His voice was unsteady. "You had better put it on again."

She held the jewel in her hand a moment, and then slipped it on her finger once more.

"I suppose you are right that I should wear this." She spoke as though in meditation.

"Even though you love me!" His tone was hard.

"But — maybe it is only for the present, Phil. Yes, don't you see that that is it? I am weak and foolish! After you are gone, I will see it all plainly, and be — sensible. That's it — sensible!"

There was a plaintive note of pleading in her voice, and also there was a hint of an attempt to convince herself on a point concerning which there was very grave doubt in her own mind. The man read it all in her eyes, read the remorse for her moment of yielding, read the eagerness to find solace in a penance, and he knew in that moment that there

would never be another flash of forgetfulness of the symbol she wore on her finger, but that it would be ever present in her consciousness; its pressure would be grappling her closer and closer to a sacred troth, and her eagerness for atonement would drive her to sacrifice.

"Of course," he said, turning from her. "Of course; that is the word — sensible. You were wearied to the point of exhaustion, and I — "

"Hush! Don't spoil it all now. I now thank *you* for understanding. Let's be partners!"

He saw her slender white hand steal hesitatingly toward him again, and he seized it in both of his.

"All right. It beats the sister alliance, Tennys."

And then they both laughed, though one was somewhat nervous and the other was guiltless of mirth. But when two people clasp hands and laugh, the danger point has been passed. He released her hand, and for a moment an awkward silence followed. His glance wandered back toward the distant bluff, beyond which was Jerry's cabin. She caught the look, and knew its meaning.

"No, I do not want to be dragged out of the

mountains a prisoner," she said, and her voice was even and brave, though her cheeks grew ruddier. "I do not like the honor one buys. I prefer to trust you."

"A charge that is most pleas — I mean, most sacred." He was dodging the danger line. "We cannot be far from the Belden place. I figure that it ought to be just over that ridge ahead of us. We have followed a horseshoe route."

"Have we? I am very deficient in what the phrenologists term the 'bump of location.' But I like your expression. A horseshoe is supposed to bring good luck, though I doubt the warmth of our welcome by Mrs. Belden."

"Anyway, it's our best hope, for the sun is not very high above the trees on those peaks.

> "'Evening's glowing sun gilds the glowing west,
> Each hunter sighs for home and rest.'

"That used to be a favorite of mine in school," he said, after chanting the lines. "It had a 'tra-la-la-la' finish — but I don't feel equal to that just now."

Tennys put one dainty foot forward and surveyed it rather doubtfully. A bit of silk hosiery showed where the leather had burst.

"I don't think I could recommend that make of shoe for Alpine work. I'll try to borrow the family mule when we reach Belden's."

They skirted the ridge for a short distance, and, discovering a small path leading upward through a dense growth of scrub oak, they boldly followed it, for Tennys suggested that, as human feet had trodden it into a path, there must be something worth while at the upper terminus, for there certainly was not at the lower end.

It was hot work, for the chaparral defied the slight breeze that had blessed them in the valley, and every leaf seemed a burnished shield of green that caught and reflected the evening sun. Phil noted with increasing anxiety his companion's frequent pauses to gasp for breath. His straw hat was an awkward fan, but he used it energetically. How far they were from the top he had but a faint idea, the path was so baffling in its windings. Nothing could be seen through the snarl ahead, and above, there was naught but the brassy sky. So dense was the undergrowth that, experienced as he was in the mysteries of a hill country, he soon lost all sense of direction, and knew only that they were steadily ascending. No axe had ever hewn

through that stunted forest, but the pathway, like a rill of water, had chosen the route of least resistance. The people of the Ozarks had never learned to hurry, and, fully aware of where this tiny trail ended and began, they were content to thread the labyrinth without going to the exertion of hewing a more direct route through the tangle.

Phil had led the way, pushing aside the drooping boughs and shielding as much as possible the girl, who toiled close behind him, her lips taut-drawn. He had not touched her in all that weary climb. He had wanted to take her hand and help her over some of the rougher places, but he dared not. At times he had found the limbs sturdily opposing their progress, and at such times he had thrown his weight against the barriers and stood at the side of the trail, forcing back the boughs while she passed, wisps of her hair brushing his face as she did so. And then she would pause where the pathway broadened, and wait for him to again take the lead. Once, as she crowded past him, one of the stubborn limbs slipped from his grasp and flung itself across her pathway, crowding her back against him so closely that he caught the faint perfume of

her hair and the slight rise and fall that came from labored breathing. He reached out his hand to draw aside the bough. The action brought his face closer to her glowing cheek; his pulse pounded madly and the hand that clutched the oak branch shook as though palsied. Then his eyes dropped for an instant; a vagrant rift of sunlight filtered through the trees and glinted from the jewelled symbol. His hand steadied, and the next instant she had stepped forward past the barrier he had quietly drawn aside.

Presently their progress became less labored; the scrub-oaks grew less thickly, and over the mountain top a refreshing breeze came stealing through the forest. And then, at last, they reached the summit.

A fallen tree was close at hand, and they sat down to rest. There were no words. They were too weary, and, besides, the man was very greatly alarmed at the haggard face of her who sat beside him, her chin on her hand. And had he but known it, there was distress in her heart because tiny threads of blood were lacing his face where the branches had gouged and scratched.

The crisscrossed shadows merged and be-

came one as they sat spent and unspeaking. Looking up, they saw that the sun had dropped from sight and the glow was fading from the valley below. Tennys thrust out her foot and inspected the ruins of her shoe. The sole had been torn loose, and the stocking above it was tattered and frayed. With a short, mirthless laugh she folded the handkerchief he proffered, and bound it around the shoe.

"'Let the cobbler stick to his last,'" she quoted.

The measured tonk-a-tonk of a cow-bell came to them and brought with it the tonic of hope. Arising, they pushed forward. For a step or two the girl was unsteady, and then she mastered the weakness, and in her bearing there was no sign of the exhaustion. Five minutes later an exclamation of joy escaped her lips. Below them was a cabin home, and in the trail before the house a horse was pawing the dirt nervously. In the saddle was a woman, as correctly gowned as though she were riding in the Park, and as the two descended the mountain she turned and stared up at them.

"By all that's marvellous," exclaimed Phil, "it's Madame!"

CHAPTER XVII

SIGNS OF AN AWAKENING

THERE was no doubt of it. Madame Le Foure had braved the uncertainties that brooded between the Castle and the Belden cabin, and now sat in the saddle watching with surprise the approach of the two. A slight motion of her bridle hand and her horse wheeled, bringing her facing them who had so mysteriously disappeared, and who now reappeared still more strangely.

Madame had had no thought that she would ever set eyes on them again. The riderless horse that returned to the stable had left her and her husband in much doubt as to their fate, but the presence of the government officers in the community persuaded them that the two would claim their protection. Jean Le Foure had no regrets that they had gone. He was convinced that there had been a gigantic blunder somewhere, and he was willing that the man and the girl should make their way out of the mountains if they could. He ex-

pected quietly to disappear himself in a day or two, and if this Elmore and the rather haughty maid who had been captured with him should gallop away — well, he regretted to lose the horses, but it was an easy solution of an ugly problem.

He doubted if Elmore would trouble himself to try to guide officers back to the place for the purpose of arresting him for having kept them prisoners. The young man seemed to take life and its surprises very calmly. And so he merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled when the faithful Daniel reported that two of the horses had been taken. But Madame — Hers was a viewpoint quite different from Monsieur Le Foure's! She stamped her pretty foot and raged in a sudden anger because the stable had not been kept locked, and then, darting to the door, she summoned Daniel.

"The signal!" she cried, snatching the hunting-horn from its resting-place and tossing it to him.

"It isn't necessary," suggested Le Foure. "I am of the opinion that they will return."

"I intend that they shall — like whipped children! The signal!"

She paced up and down the veranda, and fury flamed in her eyes, but she laughed softly as the notes of the horn moaned out across the mountains.

"He shall come to my feet! He shall! And she—!" One finger went to her mouth, and she bit savagely at her nails. "And then I'll laugh in his face—" She paused and watched Daniel as he strode away toward the granary. "Perhaps," was her delayed conclusion of the sentence.

Daniel had sallied forth to reconnoitre, but had not been gone long until he came flying back with the news that revenuers actually were in the hills. It was then that Madame gave up hope of again seeing Philip Elmore, and the horse that returned bearing an empty saddle clinched this belief.

But now in the first gauzy veil of twilight she was sitting her horse and watching two forlorn-looking figures coming slowly down the mountain side, and where the ground was roughest the girl stumbled occasionally, but the man who strode by her side made no offer to take her arm and assist her. Whereat Madame wondered greatly.

As the two approached, Madame turned from

feasting her eyes on the man and let her gaze slowly encompass the maid. She noted the dishevelled hair, and a smile of satisfaction flickered about her lips; she saw the droop of the shoulders, and there was disdain in the faint flash of her white teeth; she beheld the soiled gray skirt and the bandaged foot, and her lip curled with a contempt that made of the laugh which burst from her lips a bold avowal of triumphant scorn.

Tennys caught the note in the laugh, and a spot of red burned at each temple. She glanced quickly at Phil and heard him smother a savage exclamation. Then she walked calmly forward to where the other sat, gently switching the generous folds of her riding skirt with the pearl-handled crop. But Tennys Gray's shoulders no longer drooped in weariness, and now the proud poise of her head gave a charm to wavy masses of hair that before had appeared tumbling about her face.

"By Jove, she would be a princess even in rags!" Then Phil looked into the sneering face of Madame. "Damn you for a she cad!" he breathed.

Madame caught the sudden change in the girl's bearing, and noted the quick tightening

of the man's lips. Instantly the sneer left her lips, and, quickly drawing the gauntlet from her hand, she leaned forward and extended the tapering fingers in greeting.

"Such a delightful surprise," she purred. "We were certain that you had bidden us farewell."

"On the contrary, we have spent the day endeavoring to reach your home." Phil ignored the proffered hand, and turned to Tennys. "I believe we could be induced to eat, if the Beldens should insist. What say you, partner?"

"It would be discourteous to refuse." There was the wraith of a smile on her lips.

Madame bit her lip as she quickly drew the glove on her hand, but if any vexation showed in her face it was no more than a flash, and her smile was unclouded.

"You really appear famished," she said, tapping her skirt again with the crop. "You must have had some thrilling adventures this day. Who would have expected such hours of terror amid these peaceful hills?"

"Peaceful?" Phil shook his head slowly. "Not since I have known them. But how comes it that you have ridden across the mountain?"

"A whim — nothing more. Jean protested, but Monsieur Le Foure sees many spooks where there has never been a grave. Is that speech good sense?" Her white teeth again were glimpsed between the red curve of her lips. "No matter. I insisted on coming. Was it daring of me? Well, a woman will dare where a man will temporize. Is it not so, — ah — Ma'm'selle?"

She turned her eyes on Tennys, and though the words were carelessly put, there was something lurking far back in those lustrous depths that freighted her speech with adroit intent.

"I would say that it was very much a question of individuals," replied Tennys, turning toward the cabin. "I confess to great hunger. I'm going to beg."

"Wait, I would advise." Madame turned to Elmore; there was the slightest movement of the skirt, and she took her foot from the stirrup. "Monsieur Elmore, may I appeal to your gallantry?" She held out her hands, and he reached up and lifted her to the ground. As she dismounted lightly, her eyes burned into his for the briefest instant, and their slumbering fires flamed forth in that breath. Then she turned blithely to Tennys Gray. "You will

receive scant welcome from Mother Belden — perhaps a kettle of hot water, or worse; she is very suspicious. I hallooed as I stopped here and when she came to the door she snarled at me and slammed the door. But Nell is coming from the corral. She is a very tender-hearted little doll baby."

She patted her horse's muzzle gently, and the thoroughbred arched its neck and whinnied softly. Madame was not unpossessed of a full realization of the value of posing, and now, as she stood with her riding skirt caught gracefully in her left hand, her crop dangling from her other wrist, and the magnificent animal beside her whinnying response to her caresses, she presented a very pretty picture. And Madame was quite aware of it. She turned and caught the eyes of the man following the curves of her pose, and there was that in his look that brought a deeper glow to her cheeks and caused her to laugh softly as she flashed a glance at the weary and wan Tennys Gray. Perhaps the latter caught the faint flicker of triumph in the other's eyes, and understood — womenkind are very quick and very keen in such matters. The girl's head, which had drooped slightly again, quickly went to the old

poise, and she turned toward Nell Belden. Madame laughed again, a subdued expression of perfect satisfaction that sounded as the faintest notes of a flute, and as she stroked the muzzle of her mount her eyes were turned once more to Philip Elmore's face. The fires were not flaming as before, but beyond the long lashes mystery seemed lurking most tantalizingly. Yes, Madame was beautiful — but Philip Elmore refused to yield his eyes to the lure of her charms.

"True, Nell is tender-hearted," he replied, keeping his gaze fixed steadily on the mountain girl coming up the hillside in the twilight. "She is more than that; she is honest-hearted, and deserving of a better fate than — Daniel."

For a moment his gaze slipped to Madame, and he saw her straighten. She parted her lips, but checked herself and remained silent. Nell had stopped, and was regarding the group as if in doubt. Phil stepped toward her.

"Do not be alarmed," he said. "We came here because we had no other place to go."

"Well, if it ain't Mr. Elmore!" She came forward, buckets in hands. "And — the strange lady."

"And Madame Le Foure," added Phil.

"Didn't see her for the horse." Her tone seemed suddenly to chill. "I'm right smart surprised to see you-all."

She ignored Madame's presence, but shifted her eyes from Phil to Tennys.

"We are nearly starved, Nell; and we are begging for food. Your mother refused us this morning. I hope she will not now, for we are worn out."

"You don't mean you ain't had nothin' to eat to-day!" Nell set her buckets down and impulsively slipped one arm about the waist of the other girl, but almost instantly she withdrew it. "Reckon I ortn't 'a' done that," she stammered. "But I just felt sorry for you."

"And it pleased me," replied Tennys.

"They have been in the mountains all day, and I trust you will give them assistance. I will pay you for your trouble."

Nell turned to Madame, and her voice was harsh as she replied:

"You can keep your money. I reckon a Belden never turned nobody away hungry."

"Splendid!" Again the flute note sounded in Madame's laugh. "One would scarcely expect such pride of ancestry in the Ozarks, eh, Monsieur?"

"You find a heap o' things in the mountains you ain't lookin' for, Mis' Le Foure!"

With this retort the girl turned to take up her buckets, but Phil touched her on the arm.

"Let me," he said.

Nell hesitated, and then turned and started toward the house.

"All right," she answered. "You-all come up to the house. Ma ain't goin' to act wrong. You and — and — *her* — are fagged, and we'll soon fix you up."

Madame gathered up her skirts and followed the others, leading her horse.

"As soon as you have eaten, I'll take Ma'm'selle back to the Castle with me," she said. "Firefly will carry two nicely."

Nell heard, and, looking back over her shoulder, she said:

"I'll let you ride my mule, Joker, Mr. Elmore. It ain't a runner, but I reckon the trail's safe this evening. He'll come home when you turn him loose at the Castle."

As they neared the cabin, the door opened, and Mother Belden stepped out, a rifle in her hand.

"Are you bringin' them, or are they bringin'

you, Nell?" she called, the rifle slowly rising toward her shoulder.

"Put down the gun, ma, I'm bringin' them."

The rifle ceased to rise, but it did not lower.

"We ain't wantin'—"

"They've been hidin' in the hills all day, and they're fagged out. I'm goin' to get them something to eat."

The butt of the Winchester dropped to the ground, and the old woman stood watching the three closely, her faded eyes glancing sharply from one face to another.

"We ain't got no fire," she said slowly. "But there's corn pone and some hominy in the cupboard, and I reckon there's plenty of milk."

"I'll have the coffee boilin' in a little bit," said Nell.

"No, no. The corn pone and hominy and milk will be a feast." Tennys smiled as she spoke, but took care that the mountain girl did not see the smile. "I'm anxious to get back to the Castle, and it will be dark soon."

Mother Belden brought basins of water, and while they were washing some of the dust from their hands and faces, Nell busied herself preparing the simple repast. And when they sat

down to eat, they found that the girl had brought out a glass of jelly to be added to the supper, the jelly doubtless being a portion of a store zealously guarded and brought forth only for "company."

"I'll go strain the milk while you-all eat," said Nell.

Mother Belden sat stiffly erect near by and watched the two narrowly.

"Did the revenue men pass this way?" asked Phil.

"Them strangers did. Don't believe they're revenuers, after all," replied the woman.

Tennys looked up, startled, and exchanged glances with Elmore.

"Don't believe they are revenuers?" he asked, in surprise.

"No, I've seen revenuers come to the hills before, and they never went huntin' for stills like these fellows. They asked a heap of queer questions."

"That so? About what?"

He put the question carelessly, but Mother Belden was wary.

"Oh, first one thing and then another."

Phil helped himself to a generous slice of corn pone.

"They seem to have disappeared," he suggested.

"Humph! They'll be heard from, you bet. There's goin' to be a killin' in these hills soon!"

She had leaned the rifle against the wall when she sat down, but now she reached over and laid the weapon across her knee.

"Do you think so? Perhaps —"

"I don't think it. I know it. I dreamed o' Zeb last night and woke up. Then I went to sleep again and dreamed of a buzzard. That's the sign! Zeb dreamed of a buzzard the night before he was murdered. He always said it meant a killin', — and now I've dreamed of it, too, after all these years."

The girl rose hastily from the table.

"I think we had better start for the Castle," she said nervously.

They thanked Mother Belden, but she sat in grim silence. The dusk was deepening, and from some place up in the forest a dove was moaning dolorously. Nell and Madame were not in sight, but as Phil stepped to the corner of the house, he heard Madame's voice, no longer soft and purring, but shrill and harsh with rage:

"... that's why I came here this evening! You little fool, he's playing with you! Why do you not play at love with those of your kind?"

"My kind?" There was surprise in Nell's voice. "Ain't he my kind? He's a mountain man, and —"

"Mountain man!" Madame laughed harshly. "Why, you baby, he is —" There was a pause. "Well, never mind. But I came to warn you that he was making sport of you — a toy, do you understand?"

"You're lyin'! You want Daniel yourself, and — and — you're married, too! He'd hate you for that!"

"You hussy! I'll welt that pink face!"

Phil stepped around the corner and saw Madame suddenly raise her riding crop to strike, but as the woman heard his step she dropped her hand and turned. Her features were distorted by anger, but instantly she regained control, and her voice was again soft and purring.

"I did not expect you to leave the table so soon, Monsieur," she said. "I have been giving Nell some good advice. The dear girl has a bit of a love affair, and you know that a woman like me can tell her much that —"

"Quite true, Madame." He was watching Nell, who had walked away. "A woman like you can tell her much."

"Monsieur —" Her tone was low.

"It is time to start," he interrupted. "The hills hold many desperate men to-night."

Returning to the doorway, he found Tennys and Nell, the latter with a very pale face, and with lips that quivered. A short distance away Madame's horse was cropping the rich grass. He led it to the cabin and gave Madame his hand, and she sprang lightly to the saddle. Then he helped Tennys up behind her. There followed one brief instant in which Madame and Nell looked squarely into each other's eyes, and then Madame touched her horse lightly and they cantered away down the trail.

"Joker's in the stable, but there ain't no man's saddle."

Nell was gazing steadily at the two riders, who were fast being swallowed up by the gloom.

"I can ride bareback," he replied, and went over to the little stable, where he bridled the patient mule and led it out.

Nell had disappeared when he came out of the stable. The front door of the cabin was open, and he paused and peered in. A low

murmur came to his ears, and he saw Mother Belden kneeling before the wall, her hands clasped.

"Zeb! Zeb!" she moaned, "I ain't goin' to forget! I've got your gun, Zeb — here — here right by me, and I ain't never goin' to forget!"

Quietly he moved away from the doorway. Then he mounted and rode ploddingly away in the deepening dusk. He was close to the rose-bushes marking the turn in the trail when the mule suddenly pricked up its ears and snorted. At the same moment he heard a slight rustling ahead of him. In a moment he had sprung from the animal, and using the mule for a barricade, he laid the heavy revolver across its back and waited. In the shadow of the bushes something moved.

"Who's there?" he challenged, cocking the revolver.

"It's — it's me, Mr. Elmore!"

It was Nell's voice, but husky and unnatural. Slipping the weapon back into his pocket, he grasped the bridle of the mule and went forward. Sitting on the boulder under the bushes was the girl, and Phil heard her sobbing convulsively. He stopped, uncertain what to say.

"I —forgot you-all was —comin' this way," she said brokenly. "Reckon I forgot 'most everything after — she — said what she did!"

"About Daniel?"

She looked up quickly.

"Did you hear her?"

"Yes, I confess I listened to some of her words. It was wrong to listen, but I wanted —"

"Oh, I don't care nothin' about that. I reckon you know I love — Daniel! And there ain't nothin' wrong in people lovin', is there?"

There was much of pathos in her voice.

"No, there is nothing greater than love. It is the greatest thing in the world."

She was silent a moment, and the man stood wondering what he was to say to this maid in whose heart there was no guile.

"Nothin' greater! Lem said that, too! An' it's so! It's so! I reckon it's greater even than a promise, ain't it?"

He caught his breath sharply. Greater than a promise! For a moment he saw a diamond symbol sparkling in the grass, and a girl kneeling and begging God to forgive the forgetting of a promise!

"I don't know, Nell," he answered. "I'm

only a human being, and I don't know. I wish I did!"

"But you said there wasn't nothin' greater," she persisted.

"Yes, I know I did. But I forgot — that."

There was a moment of silence.

"A person forgets a heap when love comes," she said, at last.

"That's it! They forget a heap! God knows they do!"

Another period of silence.

"An' when they remember again — then's when it hurts!"

"You're a philosopher, Nell."

"Philosopher? What's that, Mr. Elmore?"

The question took him completely by surprise.

"Why, a philosopher is — is a person who — Oh, the dictionary is full of definitions of the word, but I think it is just one who has good common sense and uses it."

"You-all talk mighty comfortin'. I reckon it's a good thing for me that I come down here. I ain't goin' to believe nothin' Mis' Le Foure said about Daniel."

There was the hint of a query in her tone, but when she paused, the man remained silent.

"He ain't tryin' to make a — a — plaything of me, is he?" she persisted, anxiously. "You-all have been up to the Castle, an' I know you're a square man, Mr. Elmore. Tell me, is he a foolin' me?"

"I don't like to answer, Nell."

She sprang to her feet and stepped toward him.

"What?" she exclaimed huskily. "Did she tell the truth? Ain't he goin' to marry me?"

In the gloom he could see her leaning toward him, her hands clasped.

"Why, I am not certain what his plans are," he replied evasively. "Aren't you engaged?"

"No, no, we're not promised." Her voice was but little more than a tense whisper now. "I'm promised — to — Lem! But sometimes love makes — a person — forget. God! Is Daniel makin' a toy of me?" The words ended in a sob.

"I don't know, Nell," hastily exclaimed Phil. Then a sudden inspiration came. "I would advise you to confide in your mother."

"No — you don't understand!"

"Yes, I know she is severe, but I'm sure she loves you."

"Yes, Mr. Elmore. She worshipped Zeb

Belden, an' I'm his an' her girl. I reckon she loves me better'n life. But — Oh, you don't understand!"

She burst into a storm of sobs, and Phil stood there in silence, unable to frame a sentence that bore solace. Presently she ceased weeping and again stepped closer to Elmore.

"I ain't goin' to cry no more," she said, her voice dry and hard. "Maybe it ain't true. I'll find out. If it ain't, I reckon it's mighty foolish for me to take on like this. If it is true —" She seized him by the arm with a convulsive clutch. "I'm goin' back home now, Mr. Elmore. Good night."

"Good night, Nell."

He watched her as she walked back toward the house, until she was lost from sight in the night. Then, with a heavy sigh of pity, he mounted Joker and rode down the trail, watching the stars coming out in the vast dome above, and the heat lightning flashing along the mountains in the east.

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO MEN IN A TREE

PHIL knew the trail pretty well by this time, and he had no fears of a mishap, but had he been an utter stranger to the mountains he would have been certain to reach the Castle, for Joker was sure-footed and wise if he was not speedy, and the rider soon found that he had no use for the bridle reins, so he put his trust in the plodding animal and gave himself up to other thoughts.

But a few evenings before he had left the managing editor's office assigned to the very prosaic duty of investigating the land frauds in Texas, and he remembered with what misgivings he had contemplated the work ahead, work that meant poring over ponderous records filled with many figures. How little one knew where one was likely to be ambushed by life's thrills! A bug fluttered by on clumsy wing so close to his ear that the sudden humming whir of its passage startled him, and he gathered Joker's bridle rein more firmly. After

all, it was no time for idle dreaming, and as he slipped his hand to his pocket, the chill of the revolver's steel was comforting.

But it was peaceful, this night, and above him the stars had studded the sky with twinkling glory! There was the Big Dipper, and yonder the Little Dipper, while across the broad expanse was the star-splashed Milky Way. The same stars were looking down on jostling, struggling, shrieking Chicago, — on the "Courier" office, on "Grab-All" Gray, — and on Joseph Van Styne! Joker came near being startled into a jog-trot by the sudden vicious kicks he received in the ribs.

Rounding a turn in the trail, the lights of the Castle flashed into view high up on the plateau. It was odd, this sudden sighting of a brilliantly lighted mansion in the midst of a wilderness night had claimed.

"The Standard Oil Company will have a cracking big dividend this month."

He laughed lightly at his own humor, but wondered why Le Foure should have all the lights burning. Joker toiled up the trail, which had now grown quite steep, and Phil found himself clucking persuasively to the beast. Somewhere within that domain of light was

Tennys Gray — and Joker's pace seemed slower than ever. She was tired, and perhaps might seek her room before he arrived. Joker switched his tail and groaned dismally as a pair of heels thumped his sides again and again with the vigor of impatience, and then he indulged in a deep breath of relief as the rider stopped him and sprang to the ground.

"Back to the moonshiners, you confounded laggard!" exclaimed the man, turning the mule around and dropping the reins on its neck. "Get out! I can do better on foot!"

Joker plodded solemnly away into the night, and Phil started up the trail with long strides. Right here was where Lem had shot the rattlesnake, and the house was close at hand. He raised his eyes to the windows once more, then stopped with a smothered exclamation.

A dim light was rising above the housetop, bobbing up and down and occasionally disappearing, only to reappear higher up. For a moment he was mystified, and then he saw that the light was within the tower, and a careful scrutiny convinced him that it was a candle carried by some one who was trying to shade the light while ascending the tower. Phil stood in the shadows of the mountain side and

watched. Up, up, steadily upward, went the ghostly light, the many windows of the tower giving the watcher frequent glimpses of the subdued candle-beams.

And then there came a dash of music that sent a thrill dancing along every fibre of his being. Some one was playing Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," and he knew that the player was Tennys Gray. How he knew it was a problem for psychologists, and did not burden his mind at that moment. He knew it, and that was enough. Rising, dashing, rippling, the melody floated out over the rugged hills, and the pulse of the watcher throbbed to the music. He took one step forward, and then halted. Within that room was life itself, life in all of the enchantment known to youth and love; the music lured, whispered pleadingly, and he moved forward once more, his arms outstretched in the darkness.

"Tennys!" he breathed. "Tennys! You are mine — mine! By the God of Israel, you are mine!"

He raised his eyes to the starlit sky as the impassioned avowal welled from his heart, and then he halted again, for the dark outlines of the tower had blotted out a portion of the

Milky Way. He stood irresolute, listening to the piano, and with the fragrance of the rose-bushes stealing to him on the gentle breeze, but still his gaze was fixed on that pillar of gloom lifting itself above the Castle. That strange upward journey traced by the partly shaded candle meant something. What?

Suddenly there was a smothered sound from the top of the tower, as though of a brief struggle, a peculiarly weird, subdued moaning, and then all was still, and the man stood staring in perplexity, his heart thumping its way to his throat. A night-bird piped shrilly, and he started, and nervously peered into the darkness around him, his hand clutching the ready weapon. The cry of the bird came again, and he smiled grimly as he slipped the weapon back into his pocket.

"I'm a nervous old granny," he muttered, turning once more to scrutinize the tower. "I'll be shooting at my feet presently if —"

He did not finish the sentence, for his searching eyes had again glimpsed the faint glow of the candle, and this time it was descending, slowly as before. And still the "Moonlight Sonata" rippled out from the piano. In the full glow of the lighted library the figure of a

man was now framed in the window. It was Jean Le Foure; this Phil could plainly see; but as he was about to look again to the tower, another man moved into view and stood close beside Le Foure, a man of stocky build, but whose face could not be seen by the mystified man below. Clearly, it was not Daniel, for the man lacked much of having that wily plotter's height. Neither could it be one of the Japanese servants; the physique was too generous. Only for a moment were the two visible in the window, and then they moved away. Phil looked toward the tower, but the candle's gleam was no longer visible. He watched closely for several minutes, but the light had gone, and at last he turned his attention to the library. If he could only gain a view of that room!

He crept around the rose-bushes and crouched for a moment in their shadow, listening intently and on the alert for surprise. Some desperate game was being played this night in the heart of the wilderness; of that he was convinced, and as he had been snatched up by Fate and flung on to the chess-board willy-nilly, he was of a mind to take part in the game, whatever it was. He had not forgotten the tree from whose

branches Daniel had spied on the library, and he determined to profit by that bit of stealth in which he had detected the "faithful" one. Cautiously he moved forward, but kept well outside of the circle of light from the music-room window. The tree itself was in the darkness, and when he had gained the shelter of it, he arose to his feet and peered around its trunk into the room.

Tennys Gray sat at the piano, her white fingers darting back and forth on the keyboard. No music was before her, and from the poise of her head and her dreamy touch of the instrument it was doubtful if she was thinking of the music at all. She wore one of Madame's black gowns, cut low enough to reveal the ivory of her shoulders, and falling in soft folds about the piano-stool. A rope of pearls was about her throat, and in the billowy masses of her dark hair a blood-red rose nestled. Once she turned her head slightly, and he caught her profile, the white, smooth brow, the perfectly chiselled nose, and the sensitive lips slightly parted. Then the music ceased, and she dropped her arms on to the piano and her head slowly sank forward until it pillowed there.

A bitter battle was fought out in the darkness beneath the tree, and during the brief instant of its fighting, the perspiration dampened the brow of the man whose soul was the battle-ground. Finally he turned from the girl and looked up at the library window. He must see within that room — but the music must be continued so as to assist in the work of spying. He turned to the girl again. Her head still rested on her arms, and the piano was silent. He feared that some one would come to investigate as to her movements. With the piano sounding, the others would go about their plans fully confident that no prying eyes were upon them.

Phil dropped to his hands and knees, and making a slight détour, he crawled along close to the side of the house until he was under the music-room window. Above him the light streamed out, but he crouched below it where there was much of shadow, although Daniel might easily detect him should he come reconnoitring. It was a desperate chance, but the only one, and he reached up and scratched with his finger nails on the window screen.

Instantly he heard a sound as though the piano stool had been shoved back. Listening

intently, he heard the soft rustle of a woman's dress, and her shadow sprawled on the grass without. For an instant the shadow was immovable, but soon moved, and the swish of skirts grew plainer. She was coming toward the window to investigate the strange sound that had aroused her. Then the crouching man saw her face above him pressed close to the screen as she endeavored to peer out into the darkness.

"*Tennys!*"

He called to her in a hoarse whisper, and with a startled cry the girl sprang back from the window. The man raised his head slightly.

"Tennys!" he called again. "Come to the window. Do not be frightened!"

He dropped back and watched the shadow that remained motionless for a moment, but his heart leaped with joy as he saw the shadow move and heard the rustle of her skirts again. And now she was again at the screen.

"Is it you, Phil?" she whispered, and her voice quavered a little. "What is—"

"Yes, it is I, Phil," he interrupted. "Return to the piano and play—anything—but keep playing!"

"Play? What a strange idea—"

"*Please*, Tennys — at once!"

The shadow flitted away, and before he could creep from under the window the notes of the piano were sounding in a wild, gypsy-like melody. Back under the tree once more, Phil turned his eyes to the pianist for an instant. She was sitting very erect now, and with a volume of music open before her she was playing with feverish vigor.

"Glorious girl!" he whispered softly.

Calling to his aid all of the arts of climbing his boyhood had known, he threw his arms around the tree, pressed his knees against the bark, and began the ascent. The climbing was laborious, and his progress was slow, but steadily he ascended, until he was able to reach up and grasp the lowest limb, and then he drew himself up and sat down on it, resting. But he was not yet high enough, and after wiping the perspiration from his brow, and regaining his breath, he clambered on up to the limbs above.

A sigh of satisfaction came to his lips as he turned his gaze to the library, for he now had a full view of the room. At the long table were two men, Le Foure seated on the farther side facing the window, and standing bending over the table as though he had just risen from

his chair was a man whose back was toward the window. On the table before them were many papers, and though the distance was too great for the spy in the tree to determine the nature of the documents, he could see that many of them bore gaudy seals. In the corner of the room stood the mammoth safe, its doors swung open. The men took up one paper after another, and their gestures plainly showed their discussion to be an earnest one, though their tones must have been guarded, for not a murmur came through the open window to the watcher.

Presently the stranger turned, and Phil was astounded to find himself gazing into the face of the persistent one who had thrust his company on to him in the sleeper in Chicago, and who had hovered closely about him until the "Courier" man had driven away from the train on what he had planned to be a pleasant journey across the mountains with "the girl in gray" for a companion.

Scarcely had the man in the tree recovered from the first thrill of surprise, when a sound from the front of the house drew his attention. The piano had silenced for a moment, and in the stillness of the night he could hear a win-

dow being opened, the slight creaking sound also betraying the fact that an effort was being made to observe caution. From his position in the branches Elmore could command a view of the greater portion of the deck of the veranda, and now, as the creaking of the window ceased, his straining eyes caught the faint shadowy outlines of a figure stealing across the deck to the railing. That it was a woman he was certain, and as a few random chords now sounded on the piano he knew that it must be Madame slipping quietly from her room for some cause. He could see the figure bending downward over the railing as though listening to the notes of the piano; then the form stood erect and a faint, piping note quavered through the calm evening, a clever imitation of the night-bird's call. Thrice it sounded, the last time with a peculiar upward intonation.

Utterly mystified, Phil clung to his place in the branches, not daring to shift his somewhat cramped position for fear he might betray his presence. The faint glow of the horizon outlined the woman's figure so that he could see that she was standing motionless. From the music room came the dreamy rhythm of Schubert's "Serenade," but soon the alert ears of

the watcher in the tree caught a sound from the yard below, and a moment later he saw a man approaching.

"Catch this! I must return quickly!"

It was a shrill whisper from Madame, and almost as she spoke she tossed something toward the man below. The throw was not well calculated, and Phil saw an envelope fall to the ground at the very edge of the radius of light. Instantly a man's arm reached out from the darkness and the envelope was secured. Elmore looked toward the veranda deck, but the woman was no longer in sight, and the creak of the defective window signalled that she had returned to her room. The stranger in the library came to the window and peered out into the night a moment. Then he went back to where Le Foure was bending over the papers, and the two took up a large map and consulted it. However, Phil could gain no further information from where he was concealed, and he decided to wait a few moments and then descend, confident that Daniel would hasten to his room to read the note tossed to him.

He was reaching out to grasp a different limb, preparatory to descending, when he chanced to glance down, and a sudden chill

shot to his heart, for standing directly beneath where he sat was a man. The figure below was motionless for a few breaths, and then the man stepped to the tree, and, clasping his arms about it, began to climb.

Philip Elmore was not a coward. Since taking service with the "Courier" he had engaged in more than one daredevil exploit in an effort to satiate that great paper's appetite for news that would cause the public to pause in its yawning, and never had his courage been found wanting, but now as he perched there among the branches of that tree and watched the man clambering up toward him, his heart beat faster, his breath came in quick intakes, and the perspiration stood out on his forehead.

It was Daniel, without a doubt. He had spied from that tree before, and he had delayed reading Madame's message until he should again view the library. Phil heard his labored breathing as he worked his way upward! Another moment and Daniel would grasp the lower limb and draw himself up! What then?

Of course the climber was utterly unaware of the presence of another in the tree, but discovery would soon come, and then — Daniel was no boy to be idly kicked aside, but on the

ground Phil would not have hesitated to measure strength with him. However, among the branches of a tree the result of a struggle must rest with chance. And it might never come to a struggle. On the instant of discovery, Daniel might send a bullet through the man he found hiding. True, Phil had a weapon and might easily shoot first, or command the other's surrender, but he had no wish to shoot, and a command to surrender carried with it many entangling possibilities. Daniel might cry out, or he might take a desperate chance and drop to the ground, trusting to the darkness for escape from the bullet. Either would result in serious trouble for Elmore. No, a weapon must not enter into the arbitrament of this problem. If Daniel did not discontinue his climb, the watcher crouched above must risk the bullet or the struggle.

Still the fellow ascended, a few inches at a time, and still the "Serenade" rose and trembled and pleaded and hushed, only to throb again in impassioned crescendo. Cautiously Phil risked attempting a slight change in his position, a change whereby he would be able to hold to the limbs with his legs while his arms would be free. The scraping of Daniel's clothing against the tree stole from the climber the

slight rustling sound above him, and Phil drew a full breath of satisfaction as he silently extended his arms to free the muscles from the stiffness of his cramped position. At the same time he saw the climber reach up and grasp the lowest limb and slowly draw himself up to it, but Daniel did not turn his eyes toward the man who now crouched just above him and slightly in the rear, but, instead, the fellow was intent only on seeing the library.

But little more than an arm's length away, Phil waited, teeth hard-set, muscles taut as wires of steel, and with eyes that pained with the strain of watching. The man below grasped another limb, drew his knees to the one on which he had sat, and then slowly arose.

The crucial moment had come! The fellow's face came to a level with that of Elmore's, and in the darkness they stared straight into each other's eyes not more than two hand spans apart! There was a sudden gasp from Daniel, but even in that instant a hand shot out from the gloom and clutched his throat, and his shout of alarm was stifled to a choking gurgle.

Realizing that Daniel's first move would be

to reach his revolver, Phil made a blind grab toward his antagonist's right side and was fortunate enough to catch his wrist. Then began a desperate and perilous struggle, in which, however, Elmore had the advantage by reason of his preparation for the combat, but Daniel had succeeded in hooking one leg over a tree limb in such a way that for the moment he had the free use of both hands. The limbs bent and swayed with them as they fought, Phil clinging desperately to Daniel's throat in the hope of choking him into unconsciousness, and Daniel apparently abandoned the effort to reach his weapon, and fought with the savagery of despair to break that bulldog clutch on his throat. Through it all Phil knew that Tennys was still at her post at the piano, playing, playing, playing — and doubtless wondering why he did not come.

Daniel's breath now came in hoarse, rasping gasps that were horrible to hear, but Phil dared not loosen his clutch. They had fought in utter silence, save the sound made by the swaying boughs, and now Daniel was weakening. This fact he realized, also, and, mustering every ounce of his failing strength, he threw himself on to Elmore with a ferocity that broke Phil's

throat clasp, and a frantic moaning cry escaped Daniel's lips as he filled his lungs with a rush of air. But that onslaught caused the limb on which Phil stood to give way; he felt himself sinking, and, throwing out his arms, he locked them about his foe in a desperate embrace that for an instant stayed the fall. Then Daniel's foothold slipped, and down through the limbs they plunged, together; there was a fearful shock, and Phil felt that the last vestige of breath had been driven from his body.

A million tiny lights danced before his eyes, he gasped, but something had stolen from him the use of his muscles, and he lay dazed and helpless, dimly conscious that the notes of the "Serenade" were beating on his brain with torturing cadence.

CHAPTER XIX

A PRINCESS IN BLACK

IT seemed to Phil that he lay there for hours, and then the lights ceased to flash before his eyes, he found his complaining lungs filling with the cool mountain air, and as the piano still was sounding, he knew that he had lain stunned but a few seconds.

He stretched out his arms and found that his muscles obeyed his will. Then he attempted to arise, and found something soft and apparently shapeless beneath him. His brain cleared in that instant and he grasped the fact that when they had fallen from the tree, clasped in that desperate embrace, they had turned partly over and he had fallen upon Daniel. Rising to his knees, he put his hand to the other's heart and found that it was beating. The fellow had simply been knocked unconscious by the fall, and doubtless would soon revive.

Phil came to his feet and started away, but a sudden thought sent him back to kneel again at the side of the unconscious man, and as he

knelt he hastily searched his pockets. Drawing out a heavy revolver from Daniel's bosom, he hesitated, then slipped it into his own pocket and resumed his search. It took him only a moment to find that which he was seeking, a plain envelope which he was certain was the same that Madame had tossed to the plotter. Then he dragged the fellow across the yard until he had reached a point near the stable, where he left him while he entered the stable after halter ropes. It was the work of but a moment to bind him and stuff a handkerchief into his mouth as a gag. A growl from the kennels came to him, but he gave it no heed. Daniel moved slightly, and Phil nodded his satisfaction.

"I'm glad it didn't kill you," he muttered.

Tennys sat at the piano when he entered the house, but she was not playing. At the sight of him she sprang to her feet, but a look of surprise shone in her eyes.

"Why, Phil — you — what has happened?"

He glanced at himself and found his clothing in a sorry plight, with tiny particles of bark clinging here and there to the cloth. Brushing himself vigorously, he did his best to remove evidences of the struggle in the tree.

"I'll have to explain some other time," he replied. "I have an important letter I must read now."

Unheeding her inquiring look of amazement, he drew the envelope from his pocket, and with nervous fingers extracted a sheet of paper. It bore neither heading nor signature, but read:

"It must be to-night if we would win, for all is in readiness in Managua. The pigeon arrived this evening. Jose does not know it, but I saw, and slipped up to the tower a few minutes ago and got the message. It says the troops are ready to rise. Rafael is here, as you know. He brought the last of the papers that will give us the mines when the new government is ours. You have been faithful; your reward is at hand. You know my power with the army. Here is what we have sought. Never mind how I got the figures. Here they are: Start 10, left 75–3d; right 60–2d; left 19; right until stops. You will not be interrupted. Trust me for that. Then the horses at midnight. If you are ready, you know the signal. I will be listening."

Across the bottom of the sheet was added, as if it were an afterthought:

"Or will you give up a throne for a mountain doll baby?"

"Well, hang me if this isn't the limit!" Phil turned to the girl. "Here, read this quickly, and—" He had held the letter toward her, but suddenly stuffed it back into his pocket. "Yes, that awkward mule stumbled, and I slid into the dirt. Then it ambled away and I had to walk."

The sound of a step in the hallway had caused his hasty action and his glib yarn. As he finished speaking, Madame stepped into the room.

"Why, Monsieur Elmore at last!" She came forward with extended hand, which he clasped and bowed over. Then she swept him with a quick glance. "Your clothing has suffered. But no need for explanations. I confess I heard you telling — ah — Ma'm'selle of Joker's stumble."

"I had quite given up expecting him," said Tennys, "and I was certain that he had either remained at Belden's or had fallen a victim to those fierce men who are prowling over the hills."

Madame tossed her pretty head contemptuously.

"Pooh! I had more confidence in him than that." Her long lashes lowered in the artful way she knew so well, and the red of her lips curved into a faint smile as her eyes sought his. Phil also smiled, but his was a bit quizzical.

"I fear I would have fallen an easy prey had they pounced on to me. An unarmed man is very mortal, you know."

There was a ring of real mirth in his laugh now, for he had suddenly become conscious of the weight of two six-shooters in his pockets. Madame moved closer to the window, and he knew that she was on the alert for Daniel's signal.

"As for that, I am quite certain the revenue men have given up their search and have left the hills. They were blunderers. But will not Ma'm'selle play for us?" She glanced at Tennys.

"Pray have pity," replied the girl. "I have wearied myself playing. It is quite sultry to-night, and I think I will go to my room for my fan."

She turned toward the doorway, and Phil stood watching her until she disappeared down the hallway. He took a step as though to

follow, but a low rippling laugh brought him back to his senses, and he whirled to find Madame regarding him as though amused. A tinge of red came to his cheeks.

"She is very — ah — pretty, is she not, Monsieur?"

Again she laughed softly, and the note of the flute was there.

"Not pretty — beautiful." His words were crisp. "Yes, beautiful," he added, his tone mellowing. "She is a princess in black!"

"A princess?" There was a flash of white teeth between coral lips. "Oh, you men, you men! You imagine you love beauty more than power, and you do — for the moment. But it is ashes, while power is a garden in which there is always delight."

As she spoke she glanced furtively toward the window, and Elmore understood.

"You may be partly right," he answered. "But men love power, too, though generally it is in order that some woman may behold their greatness and be proud."

She moved away from the window and came closer to him as he stood leaning against the piano.

"And sometimes a woman can bestow upon

a man the very power that will make her proud to see him grasp." She shot another glance toward the window, and then leaned toward him until he could see the warm glow in her eyes. "Monsieur Philip — am I displeasing to your sight?"

So softly were the words spoken that no ear but his could possibly overhear.

"No —" He hesitated. "You are — delicious to the sight, Madame. You are beautiful!"

"Then — my Philip —" she breathed, and her warm palm rested on his hand a moment, "why should you not possess both power and — beauty?"

Her lips were slightly parted, and she touched them daintily with the tip of her tongue as if they had suddenly been fired by fever. The man lowered his eyes, but raised them again to hers.

"You mean —" He stopped.

"Yes, my Philip, I mean — me!"

"But the power?"

She turned to the window, hesitated there an instant, and then stood before him again.

"A revolution is sometimes easy! Ah, I knew your cheek would not pale! You have

courage and strength — yes, it is that a woman loves! And you can grasp and hold what I give you!"

"Revolution? Impossible in this day of the world!"

She smiled.

"Ah, then I will be your political adviser. It will be sweeter — no, delicious; I like your choice of the word! — it will be more delicious so. Revolution is a pastime in —" (A pause.) — "Nearer the equator."

"It will require long months," he argued.

She stamped her foot impatiently.

"Just what I might have expected from an American! Is there water in your veins, that you should walk around and around and around a prize before clutching it? Months? No — only days. All has been arranged during our seclusion here in these mountains, arranged by those who care not who controls a government so long as they share in the spoils of the revolution. Why else would we be in this wilderness, think you? Your American officers drove us into hiding, and for weeks they have been trying to locate us. That is why you are here, Monsieur Philip — a blunder!"

"A blunder! I should say so!"

"But, after all, you are not sorry for the blunder?"

He shook his head.

"No. It's the biggest streak of luck I ever had."

He was thinking of a girl in black, with a strand of pearls gleaming at her snowy throat. Madame could not read his mind, and his words brought a smile.

"Yes, you were mistaken for a secret service man. You were trailed from the office of the western department, and were in company with the man who is most dangerous to our cause."

Phil straightened and stood staring at her in amazement.

"I trailed from the office? I with the man? When?"

She sat down at the piano and ran her fingers lightly over the keys. Then she turned to him again.

"Does it not convince you that the game has been shrewdly played? When? The night you left Chicago."

He slapped both hands down on the piano keys, unmindful of the crashing discord.

"Good heavens, not Jack Morden's office?"

She nodded.

"Of course — Morden's office. Hartley followed you from there. He heard you talking to Morden on the street. He followed you to St. Louis and on down to where your train was delayed. He is upstairs now. But we are wasting time."

He suddenly remembered the letter in his pocket, and the sentence, "The horses at midnight." Evidently, Madame had many strings to her bow.

"What is the hurry?" he asked blandly.

"We must be away before midnight." She glanced uneasily toward the window. "What is your answer, Philip?"

He turned from her with a short laugh, and dropped carelessly into a chair.

"My answer?" He brushed a bit of dirt from one sleeve. "Oh, I shall not go, Madame!"

With a cry of rage she sprang to her feet and poured out a flood of angry words in a strange tongue, her left hand clutching at the lace-draped bosom as though she were fighting for breath. Thrice she paced across the room, and stopped in front of him again.

"You make amusement of my confessions, do you?" Her words were in English now. "You dally with me, and then scorn that which

I offer you! I— Oh, I—could kill you! I have fawned at your feet—I have held out my arms to you! I have—yes—I could kill you!"

She whirled and went to the window, where she stood clasping and unclasping her hands, and beating the floor nervously with one foot, her back to him. Phil drew the letter from his pocket, glanced at it, and arose to his feet, and turned toward her. As he did so, he heard Le Foure's voice at the head of the stairs, and for an instant he hesitated, then slowly folded the letter and replaced it in his pocket. A voice he well remembered was speaking in the hallway, and as he walked leisurely over to the piano Le Foure and his companion appeared in the doorway.

"Such delight, Monsieur Elmore!" Le Foure came forward with extended hand. "I thought—but no matter—I have the honor to present my friend, Monsieur Hartley."

He bowed obsequiously, and Phil crossed his hands behind his back as he nodded unconcernedly to the grinning Hartley.

"Quite a pleasant evening," he remarked, as though a bit bored by tedium.

"Well, damned if you aren't a cool one!" blurted Hartley.

"Tut, tut! A lady is present." Phil waved his hand toward Madame.

"You didn't let the fox dodge you, after all, did you?" Hartley had ignored the chiding. "Morden charged you not to, I remember."

"Oh, no, I found the fox all right. And I learned that foxes sometimes climb trees!"

Then he laughed with genuine mirth as he saw bewilderment come to the faces of the others. Hartley was the first to speak.

"I have already had the pleasure of meeting your fair—companion—this evening. In spite of her vexatious day, she was splendid."

"Her sex appreciate all such compliments. I shall convey your gracious expression to her."

"And quite clever, too," added Le Foure.

"In many ways—yes." Hartley smiled as he added, "But her cleverness was responsible for a friend of mine getting a black eye."

Like a flash an incident that had been somewhat puzzling to Phil became clear.

"Yes," he answered, "you saw her slip me that note, and I had to knock your friend down in the St. Louis station. The black eye was heavy pay for the note he stole."

Le Foure had crossed to the window and was speaking in a low tone to his wife.

"Heavy pay?" Hartley shook his head. "Not at all. It pointed to the collusion I was certain existed between you two. They (nodding toward the two at the window) have tried to convince me that I blundered. I don't mind telling you this, Elmore — if that is your name — nor do I mind telling you that I was sure of my game from the moment I saw you with that devil, Morden, and heard him tell you not to let your fox dodge you. Of course, you are smart enough to know I suspicioned the girl when I saw you hand her that sleeper ticket. The rest was easy — and Fate threw in a railroad wreck at just the right place to make it still easier."

He placed his hands in his pockets and rocked back and forth on his heels and toes as though highly pleased with his shrewdness, of which he had yielded to a desire to boast. Phil lounged carelessly against the piano, but said nothing.

"Come, now, Elmore," urged Hartley. "We've got you and we're going to keep you. Why not confess I have not blundered? You shall not be harmed."

"Very generous, indeed, but I cannot tell such a stupendous lie even to save your vanity. No, no, my plotter, you have made the blunder of your career." He turned toward the door-

way. "I am almost tempted to reward you for it," he added, and walked away, leaving the other muttering strange oaths.

Upstairs he found the great brass lamps burning brightly. The library doors were open, and he looked in, hoping to find some of the papers still on the table, but the hope was vain. Not a thing was there, and a glance showed him that the safe was locked. A light cough behind him caused him to wheel, and standing amid the palms and flowers of the conservatory he saw Tennys Gray, and in her arms she held Mose. Quickly he was at her side.

"I thought you were in your room, Tennys!"

She looked up into his face, and his being thrilled because of her look. She stroked Mose's glossy coat.

"It was very pleasant in here," she said, "and — I thought — you might— "

She paused, and he reached out one trembling hand to touch her, but drew it back.

"Yes, you thought I might — " He was prompting.

She raised her eyes to his again, and then nodded vigorously, like a school girl.

"And — you have!"

"Come upstairs?"

Another nod, and then for a moment there was silence between them, he standing straight and tall before her, his hands clutching each other behind his back, and she with head slightly drooped, a glow like that of old wine in her cheeks, and the lamp beams flashing on the rope of pearls that encircled her white throat and rested on the bodice of her gown. Dark masses of wavy hair clustered above a brow of creamy velvet, and the faint tints of the rose petals showed in the hand that caressed Mose, who purred his appreciation of the attention. Her left hand — was it intentional? — was concealed beneath the body of the cat.

"You frightened me when you scratched on the window screen," she said, somewhat irrelevantly. "I was pleased when I heard your voice. It was very strange, but I knew it was all right if you spoke."

"You gladden me by such confidence, little girl."

"Little girl?" She drew herself up to her fullest height, and poised her head in the old charming way. "Indeed, sir, you wound my vanity terribly. Why, I am five feet, four inches tall, and weigh one hundred and twenty." She laughed lightly.

"Yes, I was wrong." The hands behind his back were tightening their clasp of each other. "I called you a little girl. I should have said 'princess!'"

"Princess?" She curtsied with charming grace. "I am beholden to you, Lord Elmore! And you have known me so few days."

She spoke banteringly, but the man's hands suddenly unclasped themselves, and his arms went about her, and she was drawn close to him, while he stood looking down into her eyes, where the battle between surprise, doubt, and joy was being pictured. Mose, startled, sprang from her arms and beat a hasty retreat.

"It isn't true that I have known you only a few days, Tennys," he whispered. "I have known you for ages. I knew you centuries ago, and wooed you — and won you! Then I lost you, but through all the ages my soul has been seeking you, and God heard it sobbing in the desert and led it to paradise — to you! It has been night; now it is dawn — and this is its Castle!"

She spoke no word, but he felt her lithe body tremble. She moved slightly, and one hand went to his arm, where it rested a moment, and then the hand clasped his and she gently freed

herself from his arms. Her eyes looked into his, and there was a great light there.

"I wonder if you are right, Phil?" she said softly, standing before him, his hands in hers. "But — perhaps it is a mistake. After a while — after we are out into the world again — maybe we will see the mistake. We were not to forget — you remember? I forgot — once, and I promised God not to forget again." She released his hands and turned toward the latticed arch of the hallway. There she paused, and slowly faced toward him again. "But I did forget," she said, and he bowed silently to her as she passed down the hallway to her room.

He stood there, his teeth hard-set, watching her until she disappeared, and then he turned and walked unsteadily to the open window and peered long and silently out into the night.

"Nell was right," he murmured. "A person forgets when love comes."

A faint meow came to his ears, and he saw Mose looking wistfully up into his face. Under a near-by palm was a chair, and he sat down.

"Mose," he said softly, as the cat sprang on to his knees and stretched out in comfort, "you are a fortunate fellow. You can snuggle

up in her arms; you are privileged beyond walls that shut me out." He glanced toward the closed door down the hall. "God has blessed you, Mose, by creating you a cat, while I — well, He punished me by making me a man!"

CHAPTER XX

THE RECKONING

AND he was here because he had stopped that evening to chat a few minutes with Jack Morden! Because of that fact he knew Tennys Gray! And Morden was a secret service "devil"! Philip Elmore sat among the palms and ferns and marvelled at it all. So much had hinged on one or two trivialities back in Chicago. He remembered now that he had found Jack's office door locked that night, and that a "client" was closeted with the lawyer when he called. Probably the "client" was the man Hartley should have shadowed, but the revolutionist — (how odd, in twentieth-century days!)—naturally had picked as his prey the man who came forth from the office with Morden, and who had been admonished by Morden "not to let the fox dodge him."

A chuckle came from Phil's lips. His passion for fox-chasing really had gotten him into trouble, as his uncle Philip had predicted for

these many years. But the biggest fox of them all was lying out by the stable, doubtless swearing mentally and kicking prodigiously, and in his own pocket was Madame's letter, proposing to elope with Daniel this night. He drew it forth and spread it out on his knee. "You know my power with the army." Clearly, Madame was tired of her effeminate husband — she had declared that courage and strength were the things a woman loved! — and was planning to make Daniel the leader in the revolution that was now at hand somewhere. She had boasted of her power with the army, and it was on this power she must rely to give the leadership to her favorite. And Philip Elmore, American, had been offered this doubtful honor — and he had refused. He whistled softly as he recalled Madame's rage. The man who declared hell to have no fury like a women scorned had made no mistake!

And here were figures, undoubtedly the combination of the safe. Daniel was to steal the documents, they would flee to the scene of the intended revolt and seize the reins of government. Should Le Foure follow — well, an assassination is but a trifle during a revolution.

The problem confronting Philip Elmore at

this moment was as to what use he should make of his knowledge of the double plot. He had the combination, but should he open the safe?

Revolutionary documents are not pleasing literature to have about one's person. Should he release Daniel and warn Le Foure? Whichever phase of the question he took up offered complications that were not enticing. Perhaps it was better to remain passive and let the others play their own games. As it appeared to him, he had but one duty under all of the circumstances, and that was to protect Tennys Gray, and with two loaded weapons he felt amply able to do this.

A knock at the front door brought him to his feet, and he hurried to the head of the stairs to see who the unexpected caller could be. Le Foure came to the door of the music room, halted on the threshold, said something to those behind him, and then approached the front door, moving rather cautiously.

The door had been closed, and now, as it was swung open, Nell Belden stepped into the hallway and stood in the full light of the mammoth lamp. She wore a simple white dress, freshly ironed, and the arrangement of her hair showed that time and care had been given it.

"I beg pardon for comin'," she said, rather diffidently. "I want to see Daniel right bad."

"This is a strange time to call," responded Le Foure.

"Ain't no time strange when a person's got important business." The girl's voice sounded with more assurance.

Hartley and Madame stepped into the hall, and Phil caught the look of scorn that flashed across Madame's face.

"Put that creature out of the house!" she exclaimed. "I will not have her here!"

"No, no,— I reckon you won't do that, will you?" Nell turned a startled face to Le Foure. "She says that because — because —" She paused and turned fiercely to Madame. "Don't make me say it! Just tell him to let me come in!"

Madame's face flushed, and then a pallor stole the color from her cheeks.

"Well — come in, then."

She turned back into the music room, and the girl followed. Madame motioned to a chair, but Nell shook her head.

"I don't want to set down. I want to see Daniel."

Le Foure stepped to the door and sounded a shrill whistle.

"He'll be here in a moment," he said.

Phil, listening from above, doubted this statement. A minute passed, and Le Foure again sounded the signal, but there was no response.

"It's strange," he said. "I'll go see."

He left the house and disappeared in the darkness. Phil descended the stairs and stood in the doorway. Hartley came and stood beside him.

"Mountain girls are like all the rest — no stopping them when they get after a fellow," Hartley said, grinning.

Phil had no chance to reply, for there was a sharp exclamation out in the darkness, and they heard Le Foure running toward the house.

"Something's wrong!" he cried to Hartley, who had sprung to the veranda railing. "I stumbled over a man lying out there by the granary."

"Dead or living?"

"He groaned —"

"Get me a lantern," cried Hartley. "I'll find out about this!"

In the hall behind them Madame and Nell stood, and the face of each was deadly pale.

A lantern was quickly found and lighted, and Hartley, grasping a cocked revolver, strode out into the night, while Le Foure stood on the veranda, nervously clasping his hands. They saw the lantern become stationary, and then it was lowered to the ground, and they could see Hartley's shadowy form in its light. Then the lantern was again taken up, and back to the house the man came hurrying, and with him was Daniel.

Phil retreated to the music room and slipped one of the revolvers into his side pocket where he could keep his hand on it unnoticed. Daniel was covered with dirt, his clothing was torn, and the blood from a number of scratches had dried on his face. He scowled savagely as his eyes met Phil's, and for an instant he seemed about to denounce him, but Elmore's gaze was tranquil and steady.

"I don't know — for sure, who did it," Daniel replied to the flood of questions. "He was prowling — near the house, and he got me by the throat. That's about all."

Again he turned his eyes on Phil, but he either was not certain enough of his foe's identity, or else he feared to risk the exposure of his own treachery, for he did not accuse.

"Come out to the kitchen, Daniel, and I'll get you some water." Madame had stepped to his side. "You had better loose the dogs," she added.

Daniel followed Madame, and Le Foure and Hartley hurried away to the kennels.

"I reckon you-all are surprised," said Nell, addressing Phil. "But I got to thinkin' of a heap o' things, an' I thought I'd better come an' talk to Daniel."

"About marriage?"

"Yes." She looked down at the floor a moment. "I've got to know about — things."

"Well, I'm afraid — "

The sentence was not finished, for Le Foure and Hartley burst in at the door, their faces ashen.

"The dogs are dying!" Le Foure shouted to Madame, who came running back into the room. "They've been poisoned!"

Phil started in surprise at this new complication. A suspicion shot to his mind, but a glance at Nell's face told him she was innocent of the killing of the hounds.

"Lock the doors!" ordered Le Foure.

Daniel had come back into the room, and Nell was at his side, her hand on his arm, oblivi-

ous of the excitement about her. Madame stood close by, watching them narrowly.

"You're a little fool!" Daniel exclaimed roughly. "I can't marry you now!"

Nell's face dyed red at his words, but her voice remained even.

"Yes, you can," she replied. "We can put it down in writin', an' swear before God, an' I reckon God will be satisfied until we can meet up with a parson."

He turned away, but she clung to his arm.

"Let go, Nell! I'm too busy for this foolishness!"

"Foolishness? Then she was right! But it wasn't foolishness when you — you — swore you'd marry me! For God's love, don't tell me you lied!"

He broke her clutch and flung her hand from him with a harsh laugh, and went to the window to lower the curtain.

"Well, I did think I'd marry you, but I've changed my mind! I'm not going to!"

There was a sharp gasp from the girl, and Madame smiled.

"Never?" asked Nell.

"No!" he shouted, one hand on the curtain.

"YOU'RE A LITTLE FOOL! I CAN'T MARRY YOU NOW!"
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"You may as well understand it — I'll not marry you! Now get out, and never — "

The report of a rifle rang out, and Daniel reeled and pitched forward to the floor, a stream of blood staining the rug. With a scream Madame flung herself down beside him, but Nell, white-faced, stood in silence an instant, and then swayed and would have fallen had not Phil sprung forward and caught her.

Confusion and terror seized upon the whole household, but after Madame had been quieted, she insisted that the stricken man be carried to her room. He still lived, but it was plain that the wound near the heart would prove fatal in a few hours. Le Foure watched Madame closely, and Phil saw the old look of melancholy settle on his features.

The shades were drawn at all windows, most of the lights were extinguished, and with Daniel's life slipping away, the Castle settled down to a state of siege and terror, for none doubted that Tragedy still lurked about the place.

Phil had hastened upstairs, and had found Tennys in the corridor, and now, after the confusion had quieted, she sat by his side in the conservatory.

"Where is Nell?"

"Why — I don't know."

He suddenly remembered that he had not seen the girl since a few minutes after the shooting. Madame was bending over the dying man, and a thorough search of the building revealed the fact that the mountain girl had slipped out of the house during the excitement.

Downstairs the chimes of the clock proclaimed the hour of midnight. Hartley and Le Foure were constantly patrolling the lower rooms. Le Foure now came upstairs for a moment.

"Any change?" he asked, and Phil knew he meant Daniel.

"No, he hasn't spoken — and never will."

Le Foure stood silent, his eyes fixed on the room where his wife watched beside the man he had declared to be "very faithful." A heavy rapping at the front door sent him to the head of the stairs, where he paused. He looked back at Elmore, who stood close behind him.

"They've come!" he said, a note of despair in his voice.

"They? Who?"

Le Foure shook his head. In the hall below Hartley crouched behind a heavy table that had been dragged there for use as a barricade.

Again that summons thundered on the panels of the door, probably a revolver butt being used.

"What do you want?" demanded Hartley.

"Jose Serrano, and we intend—"

The sentence was cut short by the crack of Hartley's revolver, and a bullet splintered the door panel. A mocking laugh sounded from the veranda.

"Try again. You missed by only two feet."

Phil laid his hand on Le Foure's shoulder.

"I don't understand. Who is Jose Serrano?"

"They want me," was the reply, and Le Foure ran down the steps to where the other knelt.

Tennys came to Phil's side, and in the faint light he could see that she was pale.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"It looks as if a pair of plotters were about to meet justice. Another has already done so." He motioned to the room where Daniel's labored breathing could now be heard. "I am not sure of the issues, though, and am uncertain on which side to fight."

Below, Le Foure and Hartley had left the barricade in the hall and were darting from

window to window, pulling aside the shades and cautiously peering out into the night. Occasionally they fired through the windows at shadowy forms, but no outcry resulted to tell them their bullets had found targets, and only once did a shot come in reply, the ball shattering the glass close to where Le Foure was peeping out.

"Where are the servants?"

Phil propounded the query that had suggested itself to his mind several times.

"That's another strange thing," said Tennys. "Madame said they were all sent away this morning."

"The Le Foures were preparing to abandon the Castle."

For a period there was utter silence, save the moaning of Daniel and a distressing rattle that was sounding plainer and plainer in his breathing. A heavy shock caused the front doors to tremble.

"A battering-ram!" cried Hartley.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Again and again the two fired from behind the barricade, hoping to hit some who were swinging the post, but—

Crash! Crash!

The door was splintering, and Phil, standing at the head of the stairs, revolver in hand, waited with tense nerves the moment when the door would yield and the rush take place. No matter who the attacking party were, they should not reach the top of those stairs until he knew who they were. Suddenly his heart seemed to leap into his throat, for there was a crash at the window of Madame's room, a scream from the woman as shattered glass and splintered wood showered around her, and Phil ran to the door just in time to see a man spring in from the veranda deck, closely followed by another, both with drawn revolvers. Madame snatched up a pistol, but the leader sent it spinning from her hand with a blow of the barrel of his own weapon. Then he swung the muzzle around until it covered Elmore's heart.

"Hands up! Quick!"

"Good God! *Jack Morden!*"

The intruder lowered his weapon.

"Phil! You *here?* Give me your gun, though, quick!"

"No — I'm ready to help you! Follow me!"

They ran from the room and met Le Foure and Hartley, startled by the scream and crash

above, bounding up the stairway. At the same instant the door gave way and fell with a clatter, and Le Foure and his companion whirled and fired blindly toward the now open doorway, but those swinging the battering-ram had sprung aside, expecting this, as the door fell, and the bullets whistled harmlessly by. In that moment Phil and Morden sprang down the stairs, a blow from Elmore's fist sending Hartley tumbling down the steps, where he was pounced on to in a trice and secured by the attacking party, while Morden and Phil seized Le Foure and disarmed him. In the bedroom Madame was the prisoner of the man who had followed Morden through the window. It was all over.

Phil ran back up to the conservatory, where Tennys Gray was kneeling beneath the palms.

"It's all right!" he called to her. "These are our friends! But you had better go to your room until we straighten things up a bit," he added, listening to her half-laughing, half-sobbing words of joy.

Returning to the music room, where the lamps had again been lighted, he paused in astonishment, for grouped about the room

were the supposed revenue men who had captured him and Tennys. Jack Morden was giving orders, and they were obeying.

"Hello, didn't expect to see you again!"

Phil turned and saw Jake grinning at him. About his head was a bandage. Elmore nodded to him and smiled in return.

"Here's your gun, Jake," he replied, surrendering the six-shooter. "I'm glad to have the chance to return it."

"Bring in the other man," commanded Morden, and one of the men withdrew. "Phil, I'm anxious to hear your story, but I have some business to attend to first."

"Oh, the story will keep — and there's no danger of your being scooped."

There was a tramping of feet on the veranda, and in marched the guard with Jerry, whose hands were shackled. His eyes were staring wildly.

"He's trying to play crazy," said Morden.

"Trying nothing! He's as crazy as a loon! And as harmless, too, I believe," Phil added.

"He may be, but he cracked me on the head with a rock, just the same," said Jake. "I saw him, but it was too late."

One of the men who had been stationed upstairs came into the room and spoke to Morden.

"The wounded man has just died," he said. "The woman is taking on terribly."

CHAPTER XXI

THE "COURIER" GETS A "SCOOP"

THE first gray of dawn was showing in the east as Morden and Phil sat down in the library, a number of gaudily sealed papers before them, obtained from the safe by means of the combination Madame had tossed to Daniel. In an adjoining room Madame was lying down, while in her own room a silent form was covered with a sheet. Downstairs Le Foure and Hartley lay on the floor, their hands shackled, and around the Castle a cordon of guards sleepily watched the night fading into day.

"Well, Phil, I'm ready to answer and ask questions." Morden lighted a cigar and handed one to his companion.

"All right. Who won the series between New York and Chicago?"

The lawyer watched the other calmly blow a smoke ring toward the ceiling, and then he burst out laughing.

"I might have known it would be that or something about a fox-chase. Be serious, can't you?"

Phil nodded.

"You bet I can. I have been for a week — or is it a month? Say, that's another question. What day is this?"

"Saturday."

"I had lost track. One has other things to think of in these mountains. Jack, who the dickens is this Le Foure, or Jose Serrano, as you call him?"

"One of the most dangerous revolutionists that ever hatched a plot."

Phil smiled.

"Dangerous? Pah! He's a nervous little weakling."

"Just the same, he has Nicaragua all aflame this moment. He's dangerous mentally, not physically. I knew him when I was consul down there in Managua. He was plotting revolution then with General Rafael San Nordico as his right bower. The government got wise, but they both escaped and went to Paris, where Jose Serrano — or Le Foure, as you know him — had lived for some years. In fact, he is French by birth. The French government

drove them out, and they skipped to America, but all the time the two were inciting revolution."

"Pretty big job, wasn't it?"

"Not in Nicaragua, my son," laughed Morden. "They're always ready down there. They call it a republic — but it's precious near a kingdom. The men who control the government always get a big rake-off from the mines in the north of the country. That's what stirs up the revolutions so easily. They're all after tribute from the mines."

The sound of sobbing came to them. Morden knocked the ashes from his cigar and stared at the glowing tobacco for a moment in silence.

"There's daring as well as brains," he said at last, nodding toward the room where Madame's weeping had been heard. "She married Jose Serrano in Paris, went to Managua with him and had the army commanders at her feet in less than two years. Her mother was a Nicaraguan. She cared nothing for Serrano; it was power she sought. When she went back to Paris, Henri Antoine Labrouche fell under her spell. He was a priest, but became her slave, followed her to America, and took service as a

servant in order to be near her. He's a corpse in yonder now. Her husband never knew. It is just as well so."

"But he suspects something. I have seen it in his eyes."

"Well, Jose Serrano worshipped her, I know that."

"But this General Rafael — and the rest of it — what became of him?"

"He conducted the Chicago junta of this revolutionary plot. He's shackled to Serrano downstairs." Morden yawned and went to the window. "It will soon be dawn," he said. "Some day I'll tell you how I located this hiding-place; it's too long a tale now. They had the government baffled for a long time. I tried watching the mails, but they used carrier-pigeons for their letters."

Elmore nodded slowly. He was remembering a peculiar moaning sound that he had heard in the tower, and now it was clear. It was the scrambling and cooing of the pigeons when Madame reached in to take the message from the one that had just arrived.

The lawyer faced his friend, and a quizzical smile was on his lips.

"By the way, Phil," he said, "you told me

there was a young lady in that room yonder — a fellow-prisoner — and that you would vouch for her. Is her name to be kept secret, or do you mind telling me?"

A blue smoke ring floated upward, widened, and finally dissolved. Elmore coughed, there was a faint sound in his throat, and then another wreath arose from his cigar.

"Her name? Certainly." A vigorous puff at the cigar. "It is Miss Tennyson Gray."

"Good heavens! *She* here with you?"

Morden leaned across the table, his voice a-tremble with surprise. In an instant Philip Elmore was on his feet, his eyes shooting sparks of fire as he faced the lawyer.

"Yes, she is here, and — damn you, be careful how you say those words!"

One hand smote the table heavily, and the other, tightly clenched, rested on his hip. The attorney looked into his eyes for a full ten seconds, and then he laughed, laughed tantalizingly, and the flush in Elmore's cheeks deepened.

"Oh, that's the situation, is it?" Morden pointed to the chair. "Sit down, my boy, while we complete the arrangements for your funeral."

"I fail to see the humor," growled Phil, still standing.

"Perfectly natural. You're to be the corpse."

"Don't be an idiot."

"Well, it's better than being the 'lamented.' Would you, as the 'departed,' be pleased with a design of yellow roses fashioned in the shape of a fox, with a large floral horseshoe suspended from a ball bat?"

Phil glared at him savagely, but the twinkle in the eyes of his friend softened his rage, and after a moment he turned and sat down.

"What's the answer?" he asked tersely.

"Now you are speaking Chicago." Morden nodded approvingly. "The answer is that old 'Grab-All' Gray has offered five thousand dollars for the finding of his daughter, and five thousand more for the living or dead body of the man who kidnapped her. He has decided that point — the kidnapping. He'll certainly shed your blood when he sets eyes on you, for Gray loves this girl as he loves his moneybags."

"And you have a squad of head hunters with you. I've met them."

Morden leaned back and laughed merrily.

"Yes, I heard something of that incident,

though of course I did not know it was you. I was with some of the party in another section at the time. I'll see that they do not molest you — though it's a shame to beat them out of that reward."

"But don't you see what that means to — her?"

"Certainly. Rest easy, you impatient brigand."

At daylight Morden set his men to work preparing for the burial of Daniel. A rough casket was fashioned from such boards as could be secured, and a grave was dug beside the rose-bushes. Le Foure gazed long and earnestly at the face of the dead as Daniel lay in the coffin, and the lips of the revolutionist moved, but no words were audible. Morden glanced at Madame, standing tall and stately beside the open grave. She interpreted the look, hesitated, and then stepped to the open casket.

"You were faithful, Henri," she said softly. "Farewell — forever!"

From the bush she plucked a rose and dropped it on the still breast. Then she moved away, and her gaze rested steadily on the distant ridges that were being bathed in the sunshine of morning. Le Foure's eyes

were on her, and his chin sank slowly to his chest and his shoulders quivered slightly.

At a nod from Morden the lid was nailed on to the rough casket and it was lowered gently into the grave. There was a pause, and the lawyer fidgeted, nervously changing his weight from one foot to another, while the group stood silent with bared heads.

"I — I can't, Phil. You always stuck pretty closely to the church; say something — anything to make this Christian!"

"I'm Protestant, and he was Catholic — but it's all the same in eternity, I suppose. Maybe I can remember bits of a psalm."

Phil stepped closer to the grave, and his hand was outstretched above the casket, while he slowly recited:

"*The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*"

His gaze passed beyond the open grave to the trail, up which a horseman was now coming at a slow lope. A dry sob sounded behind Phil, but without seeing from whence it came, he knew that Madame's grief was fighting for expression.

"*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou*

art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

The horseman drew near, and he saw that it was Lem Johnson, and as the rider drew rein opposite the rose-bush, it was seen that his face was haggard and drawn as though years had settled their cares upon him in a night. Standing beside the grave with outstretched arm, Philip Elmore hesitated. Then he slowly lowered his hand and softly said:

"*Amen.*"

A hush fell on the party as the young mountaineer sprang from his horse, dropped the reins, and strode up to the grave, the men falling back from his path. He leaned over and looked down at the casket.

"It's Daniel, I reckon?" He looked inquiringly at Phil. "Nell sent me to find out about him."

His jaws clicked sharply as he stepped back. "I ain't pretendin' no sorrow for him, Mr. Elmore, but I'm glad now I failed."

"Failed in what, Lem?"

A shovelful of dirt struck the casket with a hollow sound. Lem turned and watched the filling of the grave.

"Failed to kill him that night I shot you."

He gave no heed to the exclamation of surprise, but gazed steadily at the men with the spades. "I was watchin' for him an' saw him go into the house. Then I climbed in at the window. I supposed it was him comin' up the stairs."

"You came to kill him?"

"Yes, I did. I heard Nell tell him somethin' that set me to trampin' the hills till midnight. Then I decided to kill him. My nerves were jerky that night — an' thank the Lord I didn't hurt you much."

The dirt was heaped into a mound, and one of the men drove down a rude headboard with his spade. Then Lem turned away.

"I want to surrender to the captain," he said. "I helped capture you and the girl, an' I reckon they want me. I don't understand all of this, but I know now that Le Foure lied to me about why he was here."

"I don't think you are wanted, Lem. Where's Nell, at home?"

The mountaineer stopped and leaned with one hand against the tree, staring moodily at the valleys spread out below.

"Yes, she's at home. Mother Belden died at sun-up. I — I —"

"Mother Belden?"

"At sun-up," he repeated mechanically. "I called in some of the neighbors an' come to see about — him."

Morden's men were busying themselves with preparations for the departure, and Lem watched them apathetically.

"He made Nell — ashamed." A dull red showed through the tan of his cheeks. "That's why I tried to kill him. I laid on the bluff yonder an' heard — that evening I killed the rattler. She told her mother last night — an' I reckon you know what happened."

"You don't mean that Mother Belden —" Phil paused.

Lem glanced at him curiously.

"Why, yes, she killed Daniel. She followed Nell here an' was listenin' just outside, but Nell didn't know it. Mother poisoned the dogs — an' took some herself when she got home. Besides, she always believed that Daniel was a revenuer, an' she'd swore to kill the first revenuer she found in the hills."

Tennys Gray came out on the veranda, and Phil felt a sudden pang shoot to his heart as he realized that they were about to go back to the world.

"What's to become of Nell?" he asked.

"I've sent for a parson, an' we're goin' to be married after the funeral."

"In spite of — of —"

Lem's gaze came back from the valley as he answered:

"Yes, she needs me now. We was promised — but she forgot. I ain't blamin' nobody livin'. Reckon it's natural for a plain human being to forget sometimes. I love Nell — an' there ain't nothin' greater than love."

An hour later Morden's party stood by their horses, ready for the start. Lem rode slowly down the trail, bearing Mose in his arms, and at the bend he turned in his saddle, waved a farewell, and then disappeared.

The Castle stable held enough horses to mount the two prisoners and the two who had been prisoners. Jerry had been released early in the morning and had plunged into the hills. At the mountain stream, tumbling along at the foot of the grade, they found a rude drawbridge. The man whose duty it had been to guard this had taken to flight, but it was an easy matter to lower the span by means of the ropes and a windlass. As they reached the other bank, Tennys glanced back toward the plateau.

"Look!" she cried.

A column of smoke was pouring out of the Castle tower, and a dozen pigeons were wheeling and circling close around it.

"The place is burning!" exclaimed Morden, turning to Le Foure.

A faint smile flickered across the man's lips, and then they again settled into a melancholy droop.

"Yes, the Castle is burning," he replied calmly. "I managed to drop lighted matches among some papers. The stable and granary will go, too. Why not, Monsieur? They were mine. I have no further use for them."

It was a strange-looking cavalcade that rode into the mountain village soon after noon, and there was much excitement, but two hours later the government men were aboard a train for Fort Smith, where the trio of plotters were to be held, pending orders from Washington. As the train pulled out, Madame's eyes flashed into Phil's for the briefest instant, and then she turned her gaze to the hills. She had spoken but few times during the day, and no word came now.

Morden and Tennys Gray were to take the north-bound train that evening, while Phil

awaited a message from the "Courier" to decide his movements. He was of a mind to make that journey back to Chicago with Tennys Gray, but—it was time for him to become "sensible." Besides, he was South on a mission. So he haunted the telegraph office and waited, hoping one thing one minute, and feverishly desiring just the opposite the next minute. But while he waited, he wrote the story of the capture of the revolutionists.

"I'll give the 'Courier' the biggest scoop of the year, anyway," he laughed.

At last the operator called his name, and with shaking hands Phil clutched the message that ordered him on to Texas by the authority of that marvellous being, the managing editor.

Night had fallen when the three paced solemnly back and forth on the station platform, awaiting the arrival of the train. Once or twice they had essayed conversation, but it sounded formal and rambling, so they gave it up and paced and paced in silence. Suddenly the canyon to the south belched steam and fire and groaning steel, and the train was before them. A moment Philip Elmore stood beside Tennys Gray in the sleeper, then he became aware that something soft and white was being crushed in

his palms. Looking down, he saw that he held her hand. There were a few words jerkily spoken, he stumbled from the car, there was a hissing of steam, a complaining of wheels, and he found that he had followed after the blinking red lights until he had reached the end of the platform. There he stopped, staring at the blur of red that soon was lost from sight, but back from the mountain's labyrinths there came floating the echoes of a whistle, growing fainter and fainter.

"Oh, God!" he breathed. Something was choking him, but he reached out his arms toward the hills where the echoes faintly sounded. "Oh, God!"

Then he listened, but no sound came back to him.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CONQUEROR

A WEEK later Philip Elmore sat in a hotel in Austin, Texas, reading a copy of the "Courier" sent him by his friend Morden. The instant he unfolded the paper a paragraph encircled by a blue pencil mark drew his attention, and he read:

"Like many other momentarily mysterious events, the unaccountable disappearance of Miss Tennyson Gray some days ago proves to have been no mystery whatever. The fallibility of the United States mail service was responsible for her father, James Gramball Gray, the well-known financier, being temporarily ignorant of her whereabouts. Miss Gray started South to visit friends, and then joined a party for a brief outing in the Ozark Mountains. Her letter of explanation failed to reach her father, and in his agony of uncertainty Mr. Gray offered a reward for information concerning her. Yesterday Miss Gray arrived home from her South-

ern visit, and a friend informs the 'Courier' that she was greatly surprised that there had been such a furor created because of her brief stay in the mountains. Mr. Gray is in New York on an important business mission, but the wires have already acquainted him with the fact of Miss Tennyson's return home."

Elmore dropped the paper into his lap and drew meditatively on his cigar.

"That's Morden's work," he said. "Dear old Jack!"

He arose and went out into the street. His work on the land frauds was finished, and he was ready to return to Chicago. Since coming to Texas he had worked with almost feverish zeal, and each evening he had placed on the wire the result of his labors, and each morning the "Courier" gave them to the public under bold headlines. But now it was over, and he was going back to Chicago. He strolled down Congress Avenue aimlessly, and finally paused on the bridge spanning the river. Back to Chicago! He leaned on the railing and stared at the water below.

Was he glad or sorry? Chicago held all, and yet — The sunlight glinted on the river, and in an odd way it brought back the flash of

a ring. Had she become "sensible," as she had vowed she would?

That night, as the Meteor thundered northward, there was one berth that knew no occupant, for the man either paced the breadth of the smoking-room or sat with elbow on the window casing, the soft breeze rumpling his hair, but always he smoked, smoked, and, staring out into the darkness brooding over the prairies, he saw strange pictures, and through his brain strange fancies flitted.

"You're a fool!" he solemnly vowed time after time, and each time he would blow fragrant rings and add: "But Lem says, 'there ain't nothin' greater.'"

By headlight and sunlight the train pushed on, bringing memories thronging to the mind of one passenger, until a pall of smoke on the horizon told him that Chicago was near. When the train slowly rolled under the sheds, he was the first to spring from the steps, and then up through the smoke and foul gases he strode until he was in the waiting-room — and there was the window where she had lost her ticket!

The electric lights were beginning their battle with evening when he left his rooms and

started for the "Courier" office, after having refreshed himself with a plunge, and dined.

"Which is the dream," he muttered, "this or — that other time?"

There was warmth in the hand-clasp of the managing editor, and there was good cheer in his voice and smile as he recounted to Phil the sensation caused by the "Courier's" "scoop" on the capture of the revolutionists and the breaking up of the Chicago junta.

"By the way, I came near forgetting to give you these." The editor held out a dainty envelope and telegram. "The note came two days ago; the telegram this morning."

Phil dropped the telegram into his pocket, and nervously tore his way to the contents of the other envelope.

"DEAR MR. ELMORE:—

"I learn via Mr. Morden that you are soon to be in Chicago. Perhaps you would enjoy reminiscences. I am always at home to you — and I am tremendously interested in the land frauds.

"Cordially,

"TENNYS."

"As I have repeated three times since you opened that confounded note, Elmore, I would

like to have you tell me of some of your experiences in the Castle of Dawn. Odd name, that. There ought to be a lot to tell besides what you wired us, and I wish— What the devil ails you?"

Phil had jammed the note back into his pocket after reading it over and over countless times, and now he was halfway to the door.

"Nothing ails me. Yes, there was a lot I didn't tell. Maybe I'll tell it to you—and maybe I will not!"

He laughed as he ran down the stairs, ignoring the gaping elevator boy. Not a cab was in sight, and he was starting for a car when a familiar voice hailed him, and he saw Jack Morden waving his hat frantically from the seat of his touring car. He stopped.

"I'm in a tearing hurry, Jack," he explained, springing up beside his friend and clasping his hand. "Got to make myself presentable and —and—"

"I think you'll find her home, all right," interrupted the lawyer, calmly. "I don't believe she has stirred outside of the yard for four days."

The red that had crept into Elmore's cheeks suddenly faded, and in alarm he turned to Morden.

"Is she ill?"

The lawyer threw himself back and roared with laughter.

"Ill? No, she's the healthiest young thing I ever looked upon. I told her you were coming — and she is bound to be at home when you call."

Phil sat up very erect and stiff.

"You don't know what you are talking about," he said severely.

"The deuce I don't! Young man, you're a chump!"

"But you don't understand, I tell you. If you read the society news, you would. There's Joe Van Styne."

Morden looked solemnly at Elmore, and coughed once or twice.

"You don't mean she—" He coughed again. "That bald-headed dollar-mark?"

"I never saw him, Jack. Is he bald?" There was an eagerness in his voice that brought the laughter back to the lawyer's lips.

"Not exactly, but he's got so much brains that they have crowded out the hair to rather an alarming degree. Not but that brains are nice to have, but — well —" Another pause, while he swept his glance over the young athlete by

his side. Then he nodded slowly. "Yes, by thunder, you're a first-degree chump!"

"Confound your patronizing way! Why don't—" He had jammed his hands down into his pockets, and now he drew out a badly crumpled telegraph envelope. "By George, I forgot all about this," he finished, abandoning his hot speech.

Morden chuckled again quite audibly, and Phil scowled darkly, but tore open the envelope. As he read, his brow cleared, and a smile showed on his lips.

"Listen to this," he said.

"DEAR PHIL:—

"Just read in 'Courier' of your exploit in Ozarks. Proud of your great achievement. Why did not you write me what you were up to? Resign and come home. The place needs you. The foxes are running these nights.

"PHILIP JORDAN."

"He could have saved telegraph tolls and got you just the same by cutting out the effervescent pride and wiring only about the foxes. When do you start?"

Phil folded the telegram and flicked it meditatively with his finger.

"I'm going to-night," he said at last. "I can get a train at midnight for Cincinnati. Hush, Jack! You said I was a first-degree chump, and as they say in Tennessee, — and the Ozarks, — I reckon you're right. I'm a chump for going near Tennys Gray — but I'm going. I'm going this once; I'm going to be a chump for this one evening. Yes, I'll start to-night for Tennessee."

Once in his rooms, Elmore worked furiously at the task of packing, but he was not much more than half through with the work when his watch told him he must postpone the packing if he was to call at the Gray home.

"I'll come home early and finish," he said, and began dressing with scrupulous care.

His heart was beating furiously when he stepped out of the cab in front of James Gramball Gray's mansion. It was an imposing pile of marble, brick, and stone set in the centre of spacious grounds. Lights were gleaming from many windows, but no one was in sight on the broad veranda, and for a moment Philip Elmore's courage oozed away and he skulked around to the side of the house, where he stopped in the shadow and stood nervously fanning himself with his hat and berating him-

self for his boyish diffidence. Somewhere a clock in a steeple boomed the hour of nine. It was quite time he presented himself, but perhaps, after all, it would be best to withdraw and send her a note, thanking her for her courtesy, and explaining that he had been suddenly called home to Tennessee. To meet her would but add to his struggle.

The idea pleased him, and he was turning away when he suddenly paused, and the hat fell from his hands, for two people had entered the lighted room directly before him. One was a man, one of those specimens of masculinity tersely described as "dapper," slight in stature, immaculately attired, with spectacles resting on his nose, and a thin complement of hair dressed with great preciseness. The other was Tennyson Gray. The man in the yard shrank back farther into the shadow as the girl walked slowly to the window and stood looking idly out into the night.

"I think it is time to change the subject, Joe," she said, turning to the man who had stepped up beside her.

This, then, was the wizard of finance, Joseph Van Styne! Philip Elmore felt a curious sensation treading his nerves, but it was not one of

awe for the man who had made "Grab-All" Gray fear his power, and had won a promise of marriage from the daughter.

"Always you wish to change the subject," her companion replied. "You follow caprice, and no end of humiliation results, but you wish to change the subject. I have been very patient and forgiving, I'll confess."

His tone was patronizing, and the girl's head quickly went to a poise that boded a storm, while out in the shadows a man clenched his hands and muttered savagely.

"I have been rather capricious, haven't I?"

She was looking at him steadily, and her voice was very even. Elmore knew that he should steal away, but he was not a story-book hero. He was just human — and so he stayed.

"And now you crown all by this madcap escapade, leaving Chicago under the name of Mrs. Philip Elmore!"

"Yes, that was foolish. But I had read his articles and — Oh, I cannot explain so *you* will understand my whims!"

"You chose a name simply because you had become interested in a scribbler's contributions! Romantic, perhaps, but very unwise. It is re-

quiring all of my tact to avoid a scandal. Now, I must insist that when you are my wife — "

The man in the shadows heard no more. A storm broke loose in his brain and he fled blindly toward the street. But at the walk he paused, gritted his teeth, and turned and strode back to the house, where he mounted the steps without faltering, and gave the bell button a vicious punch that brought a sombre-garbed servant to the door.

Yes, Miss Gray was at home; would the caller please come this way? And Philip Elmore drew a long breath as he found himself standing in a luxuriously appointed reception-room, while the flunky marched stiffly away with his card on a silver platter. He sat down, then arose and tramped nervously back and forth across the room. A footstep sounded at the doorway, and he looked up to see before him a man of sixty, hair plentifully sprinkled with silver, thin lips, square jaw, straight nose, and a pair of cold, steel-gray eyes. In his fingers he held a card.

"Well, how much do you want?" was the abrupt demand.

Elmore stared at him in amazement.

"A mistake, I think," he said.

"No, there isn't. I'm James Gramball Gray. You are Philip Elmore." He glanced at the card. "Martin gave me the card you sent to my daughter. I know this wretched mountain story, and I don't want any scandal. What's your figure?"

He threw the card from him, drew out a check-book and walked over to a small table, where he sat down and turned inquiringly. A sudden lilt of careless song sounded from somewhere in the mansion, and cooled the rage of one and sent a look of annoyance to the other's face.

James Gramball Gray dropped his check-book and leaped to his feet to close the door, but Elmore divined his intention, and, smarting under the insult that had been offered, he also sprang to the door and placed his broad shoulders against it.

"It's rather rude of me, I'll admit," he said, looking squarely into the other's eyes, "but I called to see Miss Tennyson, and I have not altered my purpose."

"Damn your insolence, I'll call the servants and have you thrown into the streets!"

The magnate's face was purple with rage as he half raised his hand as though to strike the

man who stood with his back to the door, calmly disputing his authority in his own house, but he refrained. Something in the eyes of his caller bade him refrain. Philip Elmore the debonair, was become Philip Elmore, the masterful!

"Call your servants if it please you — but I object to being thrown out!"

Scarcely had he ceased speaking, when Tennys Gray stepped into the room. A warm glow leaped into her cheeks, and both hands were outstretched impulsively.

"Why — Phil!" she exclaimed.

He caught her hands, and, unaware that he was gripping the tender fingers until the pain almost wrung a cry from her, he stood harking to the call of his blood.

"Yes!" he said, and slowly he drew her closer. "Yes!"

The word was but little more than a whisper, but she heard more than was spoken. She heard the challenge of a great love, and her eyes were lifted to his. The whir of a bell sounded twice, and she turned from that wordless moment to see her father standing by the bell button, his chin thrust forward aggressively, his thin lips pressed into a straight

line. She stepped back with a quick, nervous laugh.

"Oh — have you met Mr. Philip Elmore, papa?" Her left hand still rested in that of the man. "I — forgot," she stammered.

"Yes, sometimes one forgets everything. But your father and I know each other — now."

Phil had answered, and as he spoke he glanced at the hand that still rested in his own. A wave rolled out from his heart and flooded his soul, for no solitaire glistened on her finger.

"Tennyson, you had better withdraw now," said her father. "This man came on business, I think. Where is Joe?"

"Joe? I left him in the library." She laughed lightly. "When last I saw him, he was intently staring at a very beautiful ring I had just returned to him."

There was a gasping exclamation from James Gramball Gray, and he dropped into a chair, his lips twitching.

"You — you gave him back — his ring?"

"Yes. I hope you will understand, father, that it was all a great mistake. I was very foolish — but I have decided to be sensible. Phil, you positively are crushing my fingers."

"Am I? I'm sorry! No, I'm glad, glad, for you are smiling in the pain I bring you."

She turned slowly until she faced him again, and her breath came quicker, her cheeks glowed warmer as she looked into his eyes, and she knew that the great moment had come, the moment which, since the dawn of time, God had decreed should come to her. The gaze of the man was steady, calm, masterful; something leaped from his soul to her own, and there was a struggle so violent, so unrelenting, that she trembled and glowed in the stress of it. The man spoke again, very deliberately:

"Barbarian I called myself once, Tennys — Tennys — and I suppose I am! God created the barbarian while the world's blood was warm — and the barbarian knew no better than to love with all of the fire in his veins the maid sent to him from out of the Infinite to be his queen! A thousand years ago I built you a throne — my Tennys — but I lost you — for ages — and now I've come for you! Do you understand? I've come for you!"

She swayed slightly, her lips parted, in her eyes was glory, and her free hand went slowly to his shoulder, but it no longer trembled. She had met the one great moment and yielded.

There was no conflict now, but her being was thrilling with the joy of being conquered.

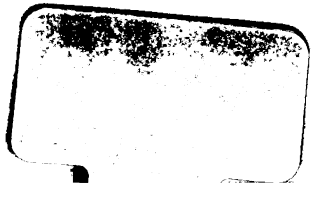
"Phil!" she whispered. "I think — I've been waiting for you — through the ages!"

A stern-visaged man had sprung from his chair, his hands clenched in fury; there were footsteps in the hall, and he stepped quickly to the door. The butler and his assistant stood before him.

"You rang for us, sir?"

He hesitated, and then waved his hand impatiently.

"It was a mistake. Clear out!"

He turned and looked back to where a maid was smiling as she looked up into the eyes of a conqueror. They had forgotten him.

A moment he stood there, the lines of his face softening. Then he tiptoed from the room and followed the retreating servants.